

ALCAZAR;

OR,

THE DARK AGES.



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ALCAZAR;

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A NOVEL.

BY

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"THE WABASH", "MODERN SOCIETY IN ROME",
ETC.

"Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori,
Le cortesie, l'audaci impresi io canto."

ARIOSTO.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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T. RICHARDS, 37 GREAT QUEEN STREET.

THE DARK AGES.

CHAPTER I.

“Over the Alban mountains the light of morning broke;
From all the roofs of the seven hills curled the thin wreaths
of smoke:

The city gates were opened: the Forum, all alive
With buyers and with sellers, was humming like a hive:
Blithely on brass and timber the craftsman's stroke was
ringing,

And blithely o'er her panniers the market girl was singing.”

Macaulay's Lay of Virginia.

THE city of Palermo yet lay in the darkness of night, although the gloom was giving place to the dusk of approaching sunrise. Not a sound disturbed the stillness of the piles of buildings which (within the old gate of Santa Agata and the contiguous encircling fortifications) loomed, in heavy masses, through the grey twilight.

The sentry paced his round inside the bars of the closed gateway ; for none were as yet astir, either within or without the barrier, who wished it to be opened : and the precautions proper to a fortress in a hostile country were zealously adhered to by the Norman lords of Palermo.

A rosy blush tinged the eastern sky ; and while the busy city and its crowded harbour still remained in scarce-lessened shade, a ray of light shot over them and gilded up the summit of the lofty mountain of Pellegrino on the west. Quickly it spread lower and lower, adown its wooded sides,—and soon it tipped with radiance the battlements of the Torre di Baych, the broad keep of the royal palace of Alcazar and the lofty tower of the old cathedral, beside the dusky harbour. Soon the topmost masts of the largest galleys in the port caught the slanting sunbeams ; and

flag after flag, and banner after banner of the many vessels that either traded with this emporium of Europe or lingered amid its pleasures on their way to or from the Holy Land, fluttered gaily in the morning sun. For awhile, their heavy hulls and storied forecastles threw broad and prolonged shadows upon the dark brown waves beside them; but in another quarter of an hour, these had shrunk back to the western side of the several vessels; a sun-ray glanced along the dancing wavelets; and the whole Kalah and splendid bay of Palermo broke into azure spangles, and flashed back a smiling welcome to the glorious giver of its beauty.

The million birds were all awake in the wooded steep of Monte Pellegrino and in the shady Chase of Monreale. Rustling the feathers of their wings and necks to efface the pressure of their little heads,

so long tucked under their pinions, and straightening their tiny legs, cramped by clinging so long to the dewy boughs, they had long piped at intervals to one another, and now cheerily warbled forth their morning song of joy. The wild boar grunted in his lair ; and the fawn sprang up beside its mother, and gently butted at her with its graceful head, and tried to coax her to let it suck once more the milk from which it was almost weaned.

Man, too, was awake. Mules and asses, laden with grapes, figs, and garden stuff, plodded along the dusty road ; and beside them, trudged the owners of the well-filled panniers, hastening to supply the market of Palermo. They approached the city : the gate was now wide opened to admit them : all was quiet within the walls, where their drowsy customers still slept ; and every peasant congratulated himself

that no popular tumult or foreign or intestine war was, this year, likely to rob him of the harvest and of the fruit of his labours. Group after group drew nigh the walls, and many a merry song or morning hymn uprose upon the balmy air and betokened the husbandman's unstudied feelings of gratitude.

An old man, whose hair was grey with years, accompanied by a sprightly lad of about twelve years of age, was the first of the country people who, this day, disturbed the dew-soddened dust on the road to the gate of Santa Agata. He had entered the suburbs ; and buildings were already thick around him. At the corner of a transverse street, the boy saw something which caught his attention.

" See, father," he cried, " what a rich tunic of purple satin lies yonder in the road !" He darted off towards it.

Within a minute he returned, pale and trembling.

“ ’Tis a dead man, father,” he whispered hoarsely.

A word stopped the loaded mule; and both together hastened to the spot. The body lay on its back. A large sword-cut was in its chest, whence blood had flowed plentifully and dabbled all the dress. The old peasant looked earnestly in the face of the dead; but turned away after a few seconds.

“ Come away, boy, come away!” he whispered.

“ Shall I run and tell the guard at the gate?” asked the lad eagerly.

“ Not for thy life,” replied the old man. “ This matter is beyond such as we are. They might say we had killed him. It is the lord High Admiral, Majone. Say nothing about it; but let us hasten on and

try and sell our fruit before the deed is known; for doubtless it will occasion some disturbance."

They passed through the gate of Santa Agata and hastened to take their stand in the market-place.

Group after group of peasants followed them. All had seen the body which they had first discovered, and all had hastened from it as from something too dangerous to be meddled with: for prudence came early to man in those days of violence. But though they all spoke in whispers in the market-place, a subdued tone of rejoicing and of triumph ran through the anxious crowd: it sparkled in every eye and curled with indignation every swarthy lip. Gradually the citizens awoke and crowded to the market to make their daily purchases. The whispered news was, evidently, spreading amongst them, though none could have

said from whom they had learned it. The scowl and the triumph were more openly indulged; and many a muttered curse on him who had so increased the public taxes, rose, half audibly, from the indignant citizens. The market-place became more than usually thronged, although little was bought that morning. Leaving the untouched panniers, the new comers turned away; and went to spread, in other parts of the city, the news they had learned from the country people.

And now a throng of the citizens of Palermo, of men, women, and children, was pressing forwards towards the Porta di Sant' Agata. Longer and longer became the line, and more and more dense the throng. With many a shout of frantic joy and many a discordant song and oath, they pressed through the barriers and on towards the place they all seemed to know. And now

even their quick pace was too slow for their eagerness: they pressed forward, they ran to glut their eyes with the expected sight! They stood around the corpse; and a howl of execration uprose—of triumph and of hatred that would no longer be controlled.

What fiends, masses of men appear in their anger and revenge! The body was soon stripped of every vestige of garment—not for the value of the clothes themselves, though precious was the material; they were torn into shivers and eagerly clutched by the mob, that each might have a token to prove that he had triumphed over the hated admiral. Men kicked indignantly the inanimate corse; and many a knife and plebeian weapon inflicted vain wounds upon its ample chest. Women bathed the shreds of the tunic they had scrambled for in the blood of the slaughtered man, and stuck them as trophies in their own hats, or in

the dress of the unconscious infants at their breasts. Shriek after shriek and yell after yell uprose ; and at length amid thundering cries of “ To the Cassaro ! ” “ To the Cassaro ! ” “ To the gibbets on the Cassaro ! ” ropes were fastened to the feet of the dead man, and he was rudely dragged along the road amid the kicks, the jeers, and the imprecations of thousands.

They passed into the city by the Porta di Santa Agata, for the tumult had been so unexpected that, as yet, no order had been given to the guards ; and they triumphantly dragged their victim along the crowded street. The news had spread. Every house had turned out its inmates to swell the rejoicing throng. Drums were beat ; trumpets and cymbals clanged on every side, and there was not a belfry in Palermo that was not invaded by the rabble, and forced to send out its merry

peal above their heads. Riot and noise and outrage and clang and fiendish triumph possessed the day that had uprose so peacefully.

Meanwhile King William slept the uneasy sleep of sloth in his palace. Disturbed by the unusual noise, he turned from side to side, and drowsily cursed those who made it, without having sufficient energy to awaken himself thoroughly and inquire into the cause of the uproar. It coloured his uneasy dreams. At first they told him that an eruption had burst from Etna, and that the lava was spreading even to Palermo: anon the wild monk, Giovacchino, appeared before his clouded imagination: he was placing the crown upon the head of his son, little Ruggiero, and all the people were shouting applause and cursing his own memory. Mad with jealousy and indignation, he started up in his bed and

stupidly rubbed his eyes. True enough, the shouts uprose, and the bells rang joyful peals from every steeple! He leapt on the floor; and, seizing a sword, called lustily for assistance. The Gaieto Pietro, and Adinulfo the trusted chamberlain of Majone, rushed into the room.

“By the holy face of Lucca! what is the matter?” cried the king.

“Murder and treachery!” cried the Gaieto.

“My lord, the High Admiral,” exclaimed Adinulfo, at the same time, “has been found murdered in the street, and the Baron of Taverna did the deed.”

“Impossible!” cried the king. “Who says so?”

“Every one, my lord.”

“And my poor friend, Majone, is slain!” continued the king. “But wherefore this uproar in the town? Are the people coming to attack the palace?”

“Never fear!” said the eunuch Pietro;
“the brutes are but venting their rage on
the body of their dead lord.”

“Fear!” repeated the king, angrily.
“Cowardly slave! didst thou ever know
William of Hauteville fear?”

“Oh, William! they have slain him!
they have slain him!” cried Queen Mar-
garet, now rushing in, half undrest, and
with dishevelled hair.

“What matters it to thee?” exclaimed
the sovereign, fiercely, inspired by a move-
ment of jealousy, to which, in his ordinary
state, he was too slothful to yield. “What
matters it to thee, I say?” he repeated.
“Give me my tunic, Adinulfo,” he con-
tinued; “and my quilted gambaison. Let
the rabble come this way, as they will;
they shall find me armed to receive them.
Cease this whimpering, dame?” he cried,
turning sharply to the queen. “Cease thy

whimpering, I say; or get thee to thy prayers for the good of his soul, an thou takest his death so much to heart. By the holy face of Lucca! will no one but women and slaves come to counsel? Call some man, if they have not all deserted me. Men of head and of arm were wont to rally round my father. Oh, Giorgio! Giorgio! thou wast true to me, my friend; but thy too great worth drove others from thy sovereign!"

The Bishop elect of Syracuse entered the room unannounced in the confusion.

"Blessed be the saints!" cried the king. "Here comes one with a head and a heart at last!—an Englishman who has all the cleverness of a Greek without his wiles, and all the skill and courage of a Norman without his treason. Well, your reverence," he continued impatiently, "speak out! Normans, whether in England or in Sicily, are

natural allies, and should make common cause against dastard murderers.”

“True, your grace,” replied the handsome Englishman, whom the chances of war or of distant pilgrimage had delayed in Sicily on his way to the Holy Land, and had doomed to find preferment and power in the land of his adoption: “true, your grace; but whom deem you to be the dastard murderer in this instance?”

“Whom? Matteo of Taverna, to be sure! and, by my father’s soul, his eyes shall dearly rue the murder of my friend. But let him wait. My vengeance will be the sweeter for being imagined. Do you, monseigneur, take one of the offices of poor Giorgio. I make you Lord High Chancellor of Sicily. Use your power to quell these riots in the town, and to save the property and family of Majone from outrage.”

The bishop gratefully kissed the hand of the sovereign; then turning abruptly to the Gaieto Pietro desired him to send in the master of the royal horse.

“Odone,” he said to the latter as he entered, “place all the king’s troops under arms. Let a strong body remain to guard the Rocca, and the rest divide themselves into companies, and march through the town in every direction, and preserve the peace.”

“And,” interposed the king, “and protect the property and family of the High Admiral, and rescue his body from the savage rabble. You cannot justify the deed, monsignore,” he continued, to the Bishop of Syracuse, as Odone left the room; “you cannot excuse it. If Giorgio Majone was guilty, they ought to have complained to me. No one had a right to take the law into his own hands; and this murderer, Taverna”.....

“Nay, your grace, he did not take the Admiral unaware: they fought on equal terms,” said the Elect.

“Did they? That is some excuse for him!” exclaimed William with the spirit of a Norman knight. “I am glad poor Giorgio died with arms in his hands.”

“And, my lord,” continued the Englishman, “I can attest that Majone had that very evening again attempted to poison the good Archbishop Hugo. It was unnecessary: the good prelate is gone to his last account. I was with him all night, and have but just left his venerable body. He died from the effects of poison given to him by Majone. But before his spirit fled he bade me give to your grace all the particulars of a conspiracy into which the traitor had led him and the Baron of Taverna:—a conspiracy, the avowed object of which was

to place the royal crown on the head of your little son."

"The monk, Giovacchino, warned me," interposed the king in tones of savage menace.

"But the real object of which," continued the Englishman, "the archbishop firmly believed was to enable Majone to seize that crown for himself."

"I will never believe it of him!" cried the king starting to his feet.

"Do not, my lord! do not!" insisted Queen Margaret, coming from the embrasure of a window, in which she had silently wept since her recent repulse. "Do not believe so foul a calumny against the truest friend".....

"How, woman! Still sobbing!" cried William angrily. "By the holy face of Lucca, thou wouldst make me almost think".....

“My lord the king,” said a new comer, Count Silvestro, coming forward abruptly—(and the whole city and palace were in such a state of tumult that regularity or courtly forms could not be expected, although William was, in general, anxious to copy the state of the Greek emperors at Byzantium)—“my lord the king, I come to crave your pardon and safe-conduct for as true and loyal a knight as any in your dominions—for the Baron of Taverna.”

“Now, by heaven, this is too bad!” exclaimed William passionately.

“There is no one more loyal and true,” persisted the new comer.

“Traitors then, indeed, are the rest!” cried the king. “I will never pardon a man who could slay my own personal friend, and his own father-in-law to boot.”

“Nay, my lord, that adds little to the crime, if crime it be,” interposed the Bishop

elect of Syracuse. "The good archbishop assured me that the engagement for a future marriage had been contracted by Majone with no other view than to bind the young nobleman to his faction. *We* all know that his heart was elsewhere placed ; and that he hated the thralldom in which he was held."

"Moreover," added the Conte Silvestro, "it was a question with him and the archbishop and the admiral, which should first slay the other. Majone had already attempted the life of the archbishop. This was known to all the world beyond the walls of the Alcazar."

"Sir Count, let me remind you that you are now within the walls of the Alcazar and in the presence of your king," said William with anger but with dignity.

"I know it, my lord, but still"—

"Enough, then, on the subject. Matteo

of Taverna shall pay for his crime with his eyes," muttered the king ; and he turned him, in surly guise, towards the window.

In similar vows of vengeance against Taverna, in ambiguous words of suspicion against his wife, (the grounds of which he was too slothful and too indifferent to investigate), and in plans for the future government of the kingdom, indolently discussed with the Elect of Syracuse, or rather suggested to the consideration of the latter, King William spent that long and weary day. He had been roused from his slumber many hours earlier than usual, by the uproar in the city ; and, deprived of the seeming light-hearted and careless gossip of Majone, he thought the morning would never have an end. Noon and dinner came, however, at last : and some considerable time slipped away in the pleasures of the table : for although William was not noted

as an intemperate prince, yet every Norman was endowed with a capability of eating and drinking that astonished the more abstemious Italians and Greeks. Then came the siesta, or after-dinner sleep; a practice general amongst the native inhabitants of the island, but which most of its Norman conquerors were, as yet, too active to adopt. Not so, however, with King William. It accorded with all his predispositions; and none slept longer or so softly as it was his constant wont to do. Not even the events of this stirring day were allowed to interfere with this cherished habit; and many an hour glided away while he tossed on a couch in a darkened room and endeavoured to persuade himself that he was taking only that rest which his health and strength required. Meanwhile, his mind sank back to its usual apathy and began to accommodate itself to the loss of the friend

whom he had so much deplored. Between his snatches of slumber, doubts of the truth of those charges that had been brought against Majone, were even allowed to obtrude themselves. Then came visions of the vast riches amassed by the late favourite: should the tale prove true, all these would be forfeited to the crown! The thought soothed that avarice which was daily becoming more and more his master-passion: and we will not say that it made him wish that treachery should be proved against the late High-Admiral; but the contingency certainly helped to console him for his death.

Amid all these thoughts, the suspicions he had angrily vented against his queen, insensibly died away. They had never taken any hold on his mind. His indolence and friendship for Majone had before prevented him from entertaining them; and

now that Majone was no more, his indolence told him how useless it would be to investigate charges that might have no foundation, and which, if proved, would give him a great deal of trouble. He therefore decided at once that they were false: and having so dismissed the subject from his mind, his inert nature was not likely again to prompt him to recur to it.

Heaven only knows whether there had ever been any cause for his suspicions. Margaret was a wise queen; and afterwards raised a splendid porphyry tomb to her husband in the church of Monreale, where it still continues without any inscription. May they both rest in peace.

But, as we said before, we must not anticipate.

CHAPTER II.

“To find one’s friend a traitor and to gain
His wealth ; or lose his wealth but still retain
Fond memories of his friendship ? . . . Heart of man,
Can ye reply ?—If kings have hearts, they can.”

The Record.

EVENING had, at length, set in : and after a day spent in investigating the affairs of his new office and in that unmethodical gossip with the king which his grace called transacting business, the Bishop elect of Syracuse was returning pensively to his own residence. He had not ventured to appeal again in favour of the Baron of Taverna ; it being evident that, the more he was opposed, the more bent the king became upon his destruction : but he knew that the baron had quite power enough to protect himself

for the present even against the king ; and he trusted that a short time would bring convincing evidence of the treasonable practices of Majone.

The streets were even yet in a state of partial tumult. The large bodies of men-at-arms which had been directed to perambulate them, prevented, indeed, any riot or violent outbreak ; but the joy of the people was not to be smothered : and whenever they could give vent to their feelings without hindrance from the guard, shouts of exultation uprose from different quarters, and tar barrels sent their lurid flames high into the dusky skies. The city bore more the appearance of festivity suited to the eve of St. John Baptist than one that might be supposed to denote that an all-powerful minister had died. Again and again were these tokens of public joy repeated : although as often as the military patrols

were known to be approaching, the revellers rushed back into their houses or slunk away through the by-lanes; while the burning embers of the bonfires alone testified that the popular feeling had been at work.

Through such scenes, the elect of Syracuse was approaching his home when he was accosted by a pale-complexioned, withered little man, in the dress of a Saracen artizan; who, with many shows of cringing reverence, craved permission to speak with him.

“Speak, friend,” replied the bishop, continuing his walk. “I will hear thy prayer as I move along.”

“If your lordship’s reverence will permit your slave,” replied the Saracen, “I would delay what I have to say until your signoria can hear me in private. I have that to tell which concerns many, and the good of the state.”

The Englishman bade him to follow ; and they entered his dwelling together.

“ Now, friend : thine errand,” exclaimed the elect, turning abruptly to the infidel as they entered his study.

The Saracen made a lowly reverence with his hand to his forehead : then, after a moment’s consideration, he said :

“ Who would have expected that the glory of the lord High-Admiral would have passed away between the setting and the rising of the summer sun !”

“ Well !” exclaimed the bishop impatiently.

“ And the people rejoice over his death as if an enemy of the state had been removed !” continued the Saracen.

“ Well !” again ejaculated the bishop.

“ He doubtlessly had great opportunities either for good or for evil ; Allah preserve us !” murmured the infidel.

“ Well ! ” repeated the elect of Syracuse. “ To thy tale, man ! to thine important revelations ! ”

“ What if he should have abused those opportunities ! ” continued the Saracen doubtingly.

“ If thou seekest, Saracen, to discover my thoughts by this pretended self-communion, know them at once,” said the bishop : “ I believe that Majone was a foul traitor to his king.”

“ I can prove that he was ! ” joyfully cried the stranger, while his pale face writhed beneath the excitement, and his black eyes shot forth gleams of delight : “ I can prove that he was a traitor to the king, if I am assured of protection and reward.”

“ Protection shall be thine if thou labour to advance the ends of justice,” said the Englishman : “ and reward also, if thou convict the memory of a felon.”

“ Let it, then, be dependent upon the truth of my information,” said the Saracen. “ For, monsignore,” he added, “ no trifling remuneration, such as leads a paltry knave to betray his employer, will satisfy my requirements. I speak not without a weighty bribe. Yet for this, even, I will not tax the state or those coffers the king loves so well. If I can show that Majone aspired to usurp the kingdom to himself, and that a heavy debt which he, from favouritism to the debtor, failed to call in, is still owing to the crown, promise me that the debt shall be required and shall be paid over to me.”

“ A fair condition, by good St. George !” exclaimed the elect : “ I agree to it, friend, at once.”

“ That the arrears of debt which I can prove to be owing to the crown shall be mine ?” slowly repeated the sallow-faced

artizan, with the dogged pertinacity of a man making a bargain which he felt he could enforce.

“ If thou convict the memory of Majone of treason, it shall be so ;” repeated the bishop.

“ When can your officers accompany me to the Torre di Baych ?”

“ At daybreak, Saracen.”

“ Allah protect your reverence. I will be in attendance here before the sun rise above the crater of Mongibelle.”

At length, the tumultuous day we have described was at an end. Darkness covered the fair land and waters of Sicily until the moon arose in all its placid splendour. That same moon which, on the night before, had smiled so stilly upon the escape of the heroic-minded Countess from captivity and upon the bloody and then undiscovered corse of her persecutor, now

arose upon the city convulsed with frantic joy at his death, and charmed back the wearied populace to their pallets. One by one, they slunk to their homes; and all again was silent within the fair Queen of Harbours.

But rest came not among those wooded hills that seemed removed so far from the excitement of the city turmoil. A few miles to the south, arose the strong castle of Cacabo amongst the mountains: and friends and retainers of the Baron of Taverna poured into it from every side and disturbed the peaceful glades with the tramp of managed steeds and armed men, from whose burnished shields and skull-caps the bright moonbeams glanced back upon many a trembling female who, from her cottage door, looked upon the unusual gathering to which a husband or a brother had already gone forth. Noble cream-

coloured oxen of the south mingled, at times, with the press of troopers; as they were driven, by half-clad serfs, from the fields or narrow lanes that bordered the principal road, and heedlessly sauntered towards the castle they were doomed to provision. Our hero had, in truth, shown that the new-born energy yet lived within him; and with the forethought of an older knight, was preparing to defend himself against whatever power King William might bring to avenge the death of his favourite.

Thus the night passed away within and without the city. Morning had broken: and even the hour at which the King was wont to arouse himself, and to exchange the torpor of the night for the languor of the day, had been tolled out by Duke Roger's wonderful clock. In listless guise, he reclined upon his silken couch in the mosaic

chamber; and listened carelessly to the details of government which the new lord-chancellor submitted to him. In reality, his mind was more actively engaged than it appeared to be: he was secretly weighing the pleasure of avenging upon Taverna the slaughter of his favourite, with that of confiscating the treasures of the favourite should he be proved to have been guilty. These were not meditations which he would have willingly exposed to his new counsellor: he felt ashamed of them himself: but they yet engrossed his mind too much for him to take even the little interest he generally felt in discussing the affairs of the kingdom.

Suddenly, the conference, if conference it might be called, was interrupted by an unusual sound of heavy footsteps on the corridor around the inner court of the Alcazar; and soon after, Odone, the master

of the royal horse, hurriedly entered the apartment.

“Let me crave, Odone, that you will enter more gently,” said the king, peevishly. “You hurry and make as much noise as if you would take La Rocca by storm.”

“I ask pardon of your grace,” replied the officer; but I have discovered that which I little expected to find in the home of the Lord High Admiral.”

“What is it, man? Undo thy wraps,” expostulated the king, impatiently; and, as he lay on the couch, kicking, with his slippered foot, towards the parcel which the other bore in his hands, the slipper fell to the floor, and the sovereign sank back languidly on his elbow. Odone laid his package on the floor, and, opening it before William, displayed a sceptre and crown of gold, gorgeous with precious stones; the

diadem, and all the royal robes proper to the kingdom.

The king started to his feet.

"These came not from the Torre di Baych?" he asked impetuously.

"Please you, my lord, your slipper," said the officer, quietly, placing that which had before fallen off beside the king's naked foot, to guard it from the cold of the marble floor.

"To the fiends with the slipper!" cried the sovereign, kicking it up so that it struck against the mosaic peacock in the ceiling. "Wilt thou never tell me whether these came from the Torre di Baych?"

"They did, my liege."

"I told you the truth would out, mon-signore," quietly observed the Bishop of Syracuse, retaining his seat, and following the king with eyes in which a cooler observer might have marked a gleam of satis-

faction. William saw it not. He was pacing furiously up and down the little room—hobbling with one foot shod and the other naked. At length he stopped to pick up and put on the rejected slipper.

“Where were they?” he asked.

“In a secret closet, my lord. We had some trouble to discover it amid the folds of the silk and leather hangings.”

The king paced the room with renewed energy.

“Monsignore,” he said, turning, at length, to the Elect, “send word to the Baron of Taverna that I hold him to have done me good service; and that he should come to me, nothing doubting, to receive my thanks. And send, also,” he continued, with flashing eyes, “send a sure guard to take possession of the house of the traitor, and of everything in it: have all his possessions confiscated for the crown; and cast all his

kinsmen and children and domestics into prison until all his treasures are discovered. See that it be done at once," he insisted, as the bishop seemed about to expostulate.

The Englishman signed to Odone to follow him, and left the room. For a while the king continued his impatient strides; but in half an hour he called for a glass of mulled wine; and casting himself again upon his couch, was soon lost either in sleep or in meditation.

It is unnecessary to describe the joy of the people of Palermo, when it was known that the king acquiesced in the death of Majone, and had issued orders for the apprehension of his kinsmen. Wildly they uprose to wreak their own vengeance, now that it was sanctioned by that of their sovereign, upon the family of the obnoxious favourite. His son, and his brother Stefano, whom he had raised to the highest

ranks in the army, were hunted from house and, at length, seized, and ignominiously conveyed to the royal prisons beneath the palace. His dearest friends shared the same fate; while his servants and eunuchs were savagely tortured until they revealed the treasures of their late master, or told in whose safe-keeping they had been placed. Corazza alone, of all his family, escaped the perquisitions of the officers: they sought her from house to house, and attributed her escape to the favour of the people, unwilling, as they thought, to persecute her whom they believed to be the affianced bride of their new favourite, the destroyer of Majone. It was long before the exultation of the populace subsided; and ever anon, as a horse, laden with the spoils of the Torre di Baych, or of some other house of the late admiral, passed, between a guard of men-at-arms, to

the palace, the crowds collected on each side, and cheers and execrations conducted it, in triumph, on its way.

Such was the end of him who, for years, had despotically governed one of the most important kingdoms which then existed in Europe; who had raised his kinsfolks and friends to the highest wealth and rank; whom learned cardinals had declared, in dedications of books, to be the most illustrious and renowned personage in Europe; and the death of whose parents, the humble peasants of Bari, had been lately thus inscribed in that obituary of the monks of Monte Casino, which professed to register no deaths but those of popes, of emperors, or of sovereign feudal lords:—*Curazza mater Madii Magni Admirati Admiratorum, obiit vii. kal. Aug. Et Leo Pater Admirati Admiratorum, obiit vi. Id. Septembris.*

CHAPTER III.

"Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?

What villain touched his body, that did stab

And not for justice?"

Julius Cæsar.

MUCH had the Baron of Taverna been surprised by the gracious summons of the king. He had slain his more than minister, his personal friend and companion; and he was preparing to defend the deed in arms with his brother barons of the kingdom. Many of them were already collected around him in his castle of Cacabo; but the congratulations of all at being released from the thralldom of their hated oppressor could not conceal their secret anxiety as to their power of making good the deed, and of justifying their champion. And now the

king sent to that champion a friendly greeting! The sudden change in the royal feelings was inexplicable until their private scouts brought intelligence of the discovery of the royal paraphernalia in the house of the admiral. All was then explained: for all were acquainted with the violence of King William's passions, with his jealousy of power, and with his habit of taking sudden and wholesale vengeance when once he was fairly aroused.

Still Matteo of Taverna would scarcely have trusted himself to obey the invitation if he had not been supported by so many powerful friends. Their retainers formed an army; and it was immediately resolved that all should escort him, in a body, into the presence of the king. Bugles sounded. Horses were saddled. Harness and armour were braced on. Banners were unfurled. And a goodly procession of many scores of

knights, headed by some of the most powerful feudal lords of Sicily, Calabria, and Puglia, soon wound down the steep hill on which the castle of Cacabo was perched, and marched, in battle array, towards Palermo.

The approach to the city was one continued triumph. Thousands flocked out to greet and cheer them on their way. Boughs of trees and flowers were strewn on the road before the footsteps of the destroyer of Majone. Men cheered and women wept with joy, and held up their infants in their arms that they might catch a sight of the handsome face of the hero of the day. Blessings were invoked upon him in every language: Jew, Saracen, Greek, and Catholic, alike beheld in him their deliverer, and upsent prayers in his behalf.

In the city, the greeting which he received was even more triumphant. Bells

from all the churches rang out merry peals : deputations from the guilds of the several trades greeted him as he passed along. Every house was lined with the choicest tapestry, suspended from the windows and balconies : and countless thousands looked happy on the giver of their happiness. Brightly the morning sun glanced from the helmets of the hero and of his peers : gaily the plumes danced upon their crests ; and proud were their richly-caparisoned horses —bedizened^d in flowing trappings and gorgeous harness, massive with gold and jewels —proud were they to play their part in a pageant of such military splendour.

King William awaited the coming of the procession in the great hall of the Alcazar. This was an immense room on the western side of the present court of the palace. It was on the ground-floor, and had been constructed by the father of the present sove-

reign as a hall of audience, to be used on the most solemn and important occasions. In his royal robes, King William sat in all the splendour which the Sicilian court so closely copied from that of the Greek emperors : and strange was the contrast between the manly and stern person of the Norman, and the effeminate attire suspended upon his bulky limbs. Around him were all the great officers of the crown, whose dignities and duties had been so carefully appointed by his father upon the model of the Frank and Byzantine courts. The first, indeed, the Great Constable of the kingdom, was not there ; for Simone of Policastro, who held that high office, had been driven, as we have seen, into the ranks of the rebellious barons ; and was now among the escort of Taverna. The place of High Admiral of Admirals had been, for the present, assigned to the mild and learned

Archdeacon of Catania; and little were the minds of men, in those days, shocked by seeing one, in priestly robes, endowed with power over every admiral whose station was in the different seaports of the kingdom, over all those whose dwelling was upon the waters and over the mighty armaments with which King Roger had triumphed in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa:—

“ Apulus et Calaber Siculus mihi servit et Afer,”

as he inscribed on his sword.

Another ecclesiastic stood beside the archdeacon:—the Elect of Syracuse, who, as we have seen, had been suddenly appointed to fill the post of Great Chancellor, which Majone had arrogated to himself in addition to that of High Admiral. We cannot but feel proud that, in the great and palmy days of the Normans in Sicily, so many Englishmen should have exercised power amongst them. In a newly conquered

country surrounded by a hostile population, the band of adventurers who had seized upon the finest portion of Europe could only maintain themselves by the wisdom, as well as by the power, of their rule. That out of five Lords Chancellors, four should have been Englishmen, is, to say the least, a curious coincidence. Nor is it less gratifying to us to remember that all these were, in their turn, eminent for their wisdom and their justice. The memory of the English Robert, the predecessor of the present chancellor, before the office was usurped by Majone, was still venerated by the Sicilians as that of an enemy to all simony and unfair distribution of church patronage. When three different parties had offered him large bribes if he would appoint their creatures to the bishopric of Avellino, then vacant, he had accepted the payment and the

bonds of all ; and then, assembling the clergy, had revealed the scandal, had secured the disgrace of the simonists, and the election of a poor, unknown, but worthy monk.

The elect of Syracuse bore him with dignity in his new office ; and conversed freely with the king while the procession was approaching.

But another great officer of state also engrossed much of the sovereign's attention ; and by a wily, cringing, courtly manner, tried to make himself as acceptable to the monarch as was the more reserved Englishman. This was the Gaieto Pietro, the favourite eunuch of the queen, now suddenly exalted to the place of Great Chamberlain. It was strange that the Norman sovereigns of Sicily, anxious as they were to extirpate Mahometanism from their conquests, should so often have raised to dignity and power

Saracens whom all believed to have adopted Christianity only as a mask. The great Ruggiero had appointed a "converted" Saracen eunuch to the rank of High Admiral; and on discovering that he still maintained a constant intercourse with his former religionists in Arabia, had, notwithstanding his private friendship for the man, caused him to be publicly burnt before the palace: so anxious was the barbarous conqueror to make Sicily a bulwark of Christendom against the dreaded Saracens. This event had taken place not ten years before: and yet Saracens continued to be raised to the highest offices; and Gaieto Pietro now succeeded another infidel in the then important rank of Lord Chamberlain. The fact seems to be that, with an army of adventurers whose main qualifications were brute force and the use of their weapons on horseback, the conqueror of the country,

who was ambitious of founding a kingdom and a dynasty, was compelled to employ talent wherever he could find it ; and thus, to carry out his own vast designs, had selected his chief officers indifferently from every country. George of Antioch had been his first High Admiral: Saracens, Englishmen, and the low-born Italian, Majone, had since shared amongst themselves the duties of government. Indeed, the sovereigns seemed to feel more confidence in the Saracens, whose faith they freely tolerated though they wished to subvert it, than in the original Greek and Italian inhabitants of the country. The Saracens deserved this preference ; and were generally found faithful to their new masters.

We must crave to be excused this digression, into which we have been led by our patriotic wish to show the superior

character for wisdom enjoyed by Englishmen seven hundred years ago.

Amid the din of martial music and the cheers of thousands, Taverna and his escort drew nigh to La Rocca, or the palace. At the door of the great hall, they all leapt from their chargers, and followed the Baron of Taverna into the presence of the sovereign. Advancing with conscious grace, our hero was about to pay the usual homage, when William rose from his throne and, with surly frankness, embraced him.

“I thank you, seigneur, for your loyalty,” he said. “You have done your devoir; and I thank you for having saved me the pain of punishing a traitor.”

“But that I knew he was a traitor to your grace, my arm would never have been raised against him,” replied Taverna.

“I believe it. He was to have been

your father. I am the more beholden to your greater love for me ;” replied the king with abruptness and a forced show of cordiality. He turned him to Simon of Policastro who had entered with the others.

“ Brother,” he said, drawing his sword from its scabbard and presenting it to the noble bastard, “ I restore to thee the office of High Constable of the kingdom ; and again I give my sword into thy keeping. So long as I govern justly, use it for me : when unjustly, use it against me.”

To this formulary, copied from the celebrated words of the Emperor Trajan, the Conte di Policastro made the requisite reply and took the oath of fidelity with much feeling. The king then turned him to the others. “ Brother Normans and nobles,” he said, “ let the past be forgotten. I can well believe that he who was a traitor to me, was no less guilty towards

you all. You have now your will. He is removed. All wrongs shall be inquired into. Justice shall be done. Return to your castles. Disband your vassals. Proffer your complaints peacefully: and they shall be inquired into rigorously. God have you in his keeping."

He arose from his throne and retired, leaning upon the arm of the new Chamberlain, the Gaieto Pietro: while the assemblage raised a cry of "Long live King William!" The old towers of La Rocca reverberated to the sound in echoes that lasted almost as long as the faith of either party.

But the cry was taken up by the multitudes outside the court; and the name of William was, again and again, cheered together with that of Taverna, the giver of their present hopes, the hero of the day. Amid the crowd, but somewhat retired from

the press, and screened in an angle of the Alcazar, stood two Saracens, who took no part in the public rejoicing, and seemed to mock the festivity by angry frowns or supercilious smiles. They conversed together in whispers. The one was easily recognized as the sickly-looking, intriguing artizan who had first manufactured the royal jewels for Majone and had then betrayed the secret of their existence to the Bishop of Syracuse and his officers; in the dark and begrimed countenance and in the tattered garb of the other more commanding figure, it was difficult to recognize the dashing robber, Abderachman, the former assailant of the Lady Corazza, the claimant of the barony of Cacabo.

They conversed together in whispers.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Fly to the desert, fly with me,
Our Arab tents are rude for thee :
But oh ! the choice what heart can doubt
Of tents with love or thrones without ? ”

Lalla Rookh.

HEEDLESS of all the turmoil attendant upon the Baron of Taverna's triumphant entry into Palermo and reconciliation with the king, the pale Saracen artizan conversed, as we said, in an angle of the palace with the outlawed Abderachman. The tattered disguise assumed by the latter was not, indeed, necessary to his safety ; for in the excitement of the city, none would have heeded an individual, however previously obnoxious. Such mighty interests had been at stake, such mighty passions had

been gratified by the fall of Majone, that matters of mere police and concerning only the safety of individuals, seemed unworthy of a moment's consideration. This the robber now felt; and little heeded to maintain his disguise. It had been assumed in obedience to the hints conveyed by Gavaretto, when, as will be recollected, he had allowed him to escape from the royal dungeons, in obedience to the orders of the late High Admiral, instead of breaking him on the wheel to which he had been condemned. Since that period, the Saracen had deemed it prudent not to follow too openly his usual daring pursuits, nor to trust too implicitly to the favour of the minister: for he had felt that he was too well known to hundreds in Palermo to venture undisguised within its walls, and again entrust his safety to the connivance of a jailor.

Now, however, he laughed openly at the fears expressed by his more timid kinsman. "Tush ! tush !" he said ; " these people have other matters to think of. Seest thou not that he who can strike a good blow is the hero of the day. The slavish rabble feel kindly towards swordsmen for doing that for them which they dared not do for themselves ; and were I recognized, I might perchance come in for a share of their heroic admiration."

" Better not risk the experiment, kinsman," whispered the artizan.

" I do not intend to do so," replied Abderachman in a less subdued tone of voice. " Still, it is needful that I should see what is going on, and should make my own play amid the general joy. This enthusiasm for the usurper of Cacabo is too hot to last among the people : and we must devise some means to prevent King Wil-

liam from falling asleep on the neck of the murderer of his friend. How can this be most easily done?"

"By putting his avarice between them," answered the jeweller: "and depend upon it, that he will follow the bait as surely as the true believer turns to the tomb of Mecca."

"Allah il Allah! thou art a kinsman worth having. Show me thy device, cousin," exclaimed Abderachman.

"I have won the English Bishop of Syracuse to promise me, in reward for having discovered the jewels and proved Majone's treachery, to promise me whatever unknown and unclaimed debt I can show to be owing to the crown. Hast thou forgotten the tenure on which the lands of Cacabo are held by the usurper: so many plumps of spears, or else so many gold pieces to subsidize the king in his wars?"

“And neither have been paid for years!” cried the outlaw joyfully interrupting him. “By heaven, Azab, thy cunning is worth all my skill in arms!”

“Majone never called for it; for he always intended to marry this baron to his daughter,” continued the artizan; “and he would gladly, therefore, have had the quit-rent forgotten. But mark me, cousin: I am not such a thick-skulled Norman as to expect that King William will allow me to receive all the arrears: he will claim them for himself as well as the future dues.”

“And then will there be war between him and the Baron,” interposed Abderachman. “I see it all; and, in the quarrel, we may have a chance to recover the broad lands of our fathers. I have vowed by the holy prophet never to rest until the castle, so basely confiscated, be wrested back from the invaders.”

“It can never be ours,” muttered the artizan with an ironical, and yet half-confiding smile.

“It can never be thine, perhaps ; because traffic has debased thy soul almost to the level of that of a Nazareen : but though all the heads of our race died in defence of their country, some of their wild and pure desert blood yet runs in my veins, and prompts me to grasp at those rights between which and me the sword of the Norman hath left no other claimant. But enough of this. Thou knowest the hope for which I live. Well for us that the shouts and the gabble of these idiots prevent them from hearing my words ! But tell me, Azab,” he continued more coolly, —“I know that thou dost not move without a motive,—wherefore didst thou discover thy handiwork and bring down the king’s wrath upon the memory of Majone ? He was friendly to me.”

“He *said* he was,” replied the other : “but I was not such a fool as to believe that he would act against his own son-in-law to favour a Saracen outlaw. Besides, he was dead. I wished, therefore, to secure a new patron in the king or, at all events, to make a scramble in which we might come in for our share !”

“By Allah, but thou shouldst have given me notice ! William has been too quick for us. Not a house of Majone but has been ransacked ; not a kinsman of his but has been already lodged in the dungeons of the Alcazar.”

“All but the Lady Corazza, whom they cannot find,” observed Azab.

“Sayest thou so ? Is she not found ?” exclaimed Abderachman joyfully seizing hold of the jeweller’s shriveled arm. “Allah, thou art merciful still ! One of my fellows saw her go forth towards her

old haunts two days ago. Without a doubt, she is there still. I must after her."

"Nay, but wherefore? What good can she do thee?" expostulated the other.

"None. But she most likely knows of some secret hoard of her father's wealth that the king has not yet discovered. Nothing can be done in Palermo, amid all these men-at-arms and guards, without surer knowledge than I now possess. I must get it from the little vixen, Corazza. I have had her once before in my grasp: but she shall not escape from me again without paying toll. Farewell, cousin. I am after her."

He drew his brown cap and tattered cloak closer round his gaunt limbs, and glided noiselessly through the crowd. As he passed along, he whispered to several other wild-looking Saracens, most of whom were armed with the full complement of

weapons which the very liberal customs of the times permitted to be worn, without attracting notice, within the walls of a city. They were all standing at no great distance from one another, nor from the spot which the outlaw had occupied during the passing of the procession. A glance of intelligence from each replied to his injunction: and a few minutes afterwards, each one quietly withdrew from the throng that still encumbered all the Cassaro.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, shouts of triumph from the mob greeted the appearance of the Baron of Taverna and his compeers as they reissued from the royal hall of audience. Again and again it was repeated in every quarter of the city. It was caught up and renewed in derisive tones by half a score of savage-looking Saracens, who, with Abderachman at their head, galloped over the bridge across the

rippling Papireto beyond the walls of Santa Agata, and brandished their scimitars above their heads as they wildly dashed towards the forest of Monreale.

CHAPTER V.

EGO ROSALIA
SINIBALDI QUISQUI-
NE ET ROSARUM
DOMINI FILIA AMORE
DEI MEI JESU
CHRISTI
IN HOC
ANTRO HABITA-
RI DECRETAVI.

Inscription in a cave in Mount Quisquina.

THE supposition of the outlawed Abbe-
rachman was correct. Corazza, with her
friend and companion Theresa, and a few
male attendants, had ridden out towards
the convent of San Martino on the evening
that witnessed the death of Majone. The
restless spirit of the young lady ever urged
her to wander beyond the accustomed
haunts of those of her age and condition :

and she was, moreover, anxious to meet again the mysterious personage who had first sent Matteo of Taverna to her assistance, and had then urged him to woo her for his wife. Of late, she had had cause to doubt the fidelity of the knight who had once seemed to acquiesce so readily in the designs of her preserver. He had almost entirely shunned her sight before he departed on his embassy to the barons of Italy. Of course, she knew not that he had there openly renounced her. But she was suspicious, jealous: and an interview with her whom Theresa had called Rosalia might calm her fears, or tell her how to call back her truant lover.

And the hope of meeting again with this same mysterious but honoured vision had induced Theresa gladly to acquiesce in the wish of her young charge. We have seen with what deep devotion she had hailed

her, at their former extraordinary meeting, as the friend and loved ward of earlier years. Rosalia had charged her not to follow her, not to speak of her; and she had faithfully obeyed her wishes. But her anxiety to meet her again and to hear more of the strange inward promptings which had urged so young a maiden, the niece of the reigning sovereign, to forsake the world and her own station in it, and to seek refuge in the wilderness of the forest—that anxiety had gone on increasing during the last few weeks. For the retreat of the Princess Rosalia was now known to hundreds; true, indeed, that they knew not who she was; they knew not her royal birth, nor the dangers to which the jealousy of King William had exposed her; but the fame of her wonderful beauty and sanctity had already widely spread. Already it was widely

known that a young hermit wandered near the convent of San Martino whose look was more than human ; whose counsel was said to have preserved her votaries amid overwhelming dangers ; whose spirit was, according to popular report, endowed with a prophetic power ; and whom many averred to have healed diseases which could be cured by no power that was not miraculously interposed.

Theresa had heard all these whispered rumours : she was herself aware of the piety and intelligence beyond her years which had ever characterized her former friend ; in her own mind, there was a depth of religious feeling which made her readily bow down to whatever was wonderful, if only it was supposed to be inspired by heaven : and without revealing the secret of the hermit princess, she willingly reported and even magnified her

supposed excellence, in the hope of inspiring, into the all-worldly-minded Co-razza, some portion of the heavenward aspirations of her former charge.

Such were the feelings with which both had sought the convent wilds on the fatal night whose events we have recorded. It was no difficult matter to discover the retreat of Rosalia, to which many now thronged every week; and they were advancing towards it through the forest, under the guidance of a pious goatherd who recounted to them, as they walked along, all the miracles which, he averred, had been performed by the object of their search, when, as they emerged from a narrow path in the copse-wood into a more open glade, the virgin hermit herself entered upon it from a deer track on the opposite side. She could not now have avoided the meeting, even had she been

desirous of doing so : for Theresa darted forwards, and seizing her hand, covered it with kisses, while she murmured forth the joy of her warm pious heart at again meeting her beloved ward.

“ Enough, enough, good Theresa,” said the hermit gently. “ We shall be too late for Complin at the church. Bid the lady Corazza come thither also. The holy nuns go into Retreat this afternoon to prepare to celebrate the festival of thy blessed patron, Saint Theresa. There, alone, can her life be safe. Bid her to come and pray to God to preserve her amid the many dangers that threaten her.”

It was not without considerable difficulty that the self-willed Corazza was induced to obey the injunctions of the hermit. The advice and exhortations of Theresa would have had no effect upon her if they had not been strengthened by her own blind super-

stitious dread of the personage she had come out to consult, and by her fears lest, if offended, she should refuse to charm back her betrothed lover to her side. These considerations made her yield. The attendants were sent back to her father to inform him that she had been induced to spend the next two days in religious retreat with the nuns of San Martino ; and, rather sulkily, she then followed Theresa into the church.

The last notes of the beautiful Sicilian hymn, pealed forth in richest cadences by unseen voices in the choir, were dying away in harmonious breathings amongst the cupolas of the little church, when the two passed beneath its pointed door. This church, one of the earliest raised by the Norman invaders of Sicily (it had been built by the father of the present king), still remains to delight and to puzzle the

antiquary, so completely does it resemble the mosques of the Saracens, from whom its style of architecture had been copied. It was, indeed, in the shape of a Latin cross : but this could not counteract the Saracenic character imparted by the five little cupolas that rose above its roof. No rich mosaics adorned its walls : but the plain squared stones of which they were built gave it an air of noble simplicity that was startling, after the gorgeous shrines generally raised according to the taste of the Byzantine Greeks. Earnest sounded the voices of the priest and of the nuns and the small congregation, as the beautiful service proceeded, and one after the other they asserted a belief in the glorious “ Communion of Saints ” :—confessing to those in heaven whatsoever they had done unworthy of their high fellowship, and calling upon them to intercede, with the common Lord

of them all, that he would regulate their thoughts, words, and deeds, and unite them all in the same life everlasting. Earnest, deeply earnest, were the prayers that uprose from the guileless breast of the innocent Rosalia and the scarcely less pious heart of Theresa; but to Corazza, that touching service was but an hour of weariness and indifference. Her feelings were all of this world: and she only felt annoyance at having been entrapped into spending a whole day in what, to her, seemed the monotonous solitude of a convent.

And yet how gratefully that day fled by to the pious inmates of the house and to the two strangers who, like them, had learned to commune with God and with their own hearts! The world, to them, had passed away: even the small cares of the conventual life had ceased for the time. Memory was annihilated save when it told

them of some imperfection hitherto, perhaps, unnoticed : conscience and hope and faith and charity were alone awake within them. And for those pious souls how sweet it was to dive down, down into the remotest recesses of conscience, and to find there no sin that was not long ago repented of, no present will that was contrary to the will of God, no affection that He would not approve, no doubt that He would not dispel, no aspiration that did not tend towards Him ? Earthly desires, earthly hopes they knew not, save only in so far as they were involved with real duties and cheerful submission to the dispensations of heaven. For such spirits, how sweet is solitude ! For such spirits, how sweet is self-communion ! How sweet are those periodical retreats from the worldly interests of life, when the soul enters into itself, and, by pious aspirations, rising midway to

heaven, feels how easy it would be to spring upwards through the remainder of the space that still separates it from the Source of all its devotion, of all its fervent love !

With minds refreshed and strengthened to tread their allotted path of life, gathering to their bosoms the flowers of submission and obedience and resignation and cheerfulness and charity with which they may hereafter bedeck the fragrant courts of heaven, such devotees return to their allotted duties in the cloister or in the world. With increased zeal and charity they return to their daily duties, embracing heaven and earth and God and man and angels in their enlarged and refined sympathies.

The Retreat was over : and the hermit princess, Rosalia, wandered forth from the convent walls in sweet converse with her

elder friend, Theresa. The Lady Corazza was with them : but her mind was fretful and anxious, and little able to join in the high communings of her companions. They spoke of the holy calm they had enjoyed during the last two days ; of the bliss of solitude when peopled by heavenly thoughts.

“ But, alas ! I can no longer find it here,” gently sighed Rosalia. “ Some poor peasants’ wives to whom I have given advice in their little ailings, have foolishly imagined that I can cure all evils, and have spoken of me in terms that draw other simple-minded persons to my retreat. Aye, Theresa, thou mayst well look guilty ; for thine over-believing heart and thy kind feelings towards thy former ward, have classed thee amongst those silly votaries of a weak maiden. I grieve not that I have met thee this once : but it must be for the last time. The caves of Monte Quisquina

no longer keep my secret: and I must wander away to some unknown and less accessible region."

"But, dearest lady," replied Theresa, "if you are resolved not to return to the world and your uncle's home—and heaven forbid that I should persuade you to give up your pious resolves for the anxious splendour or the splendid sinfulness of a worldly life—if you are resolved to consecrate yourself to God, wherefore not do so in one of these convents of pious sisters, where you would be free from intrusion and from the precarious existence which must be yours in the wilderness? Methinks the life of a nun were a blessed monotony."

"Would to God that I were worthy to enjoy it!" replied the princess: "but I know the restlessness of my own character: and I fear that I could not tame it down to submit to the rules of monastic life. Be-

sides, I am more worldly-minded than thy kindness would deem of me. I would not resign the power of wandering amongst such blessed scenes as the little world, even of this retired valley, offers. I would not resign these beautiful wild-flowers, these towering trees, the sunshine of day or the glorious orbs of night, with all of which my soul holds wondrous communion. And then to feel the evening breeze or the midnight gale rush over one's heated forehead and dash aside one's hair!—to think where it comes from or on what unknown errand God sends His unseen messenger—all this is rapture which I have not strength of piety enough to exchange for the holy calm of a conventual life. But this talk of the fresh air of heaven," she said, abandoning the tone of exalted enthusiasm in which she had been speaking, "this talk of the fresh air of heaven makes me ob-

serve how strangely heavy the atmosphere seems now to weigh down all nature. Surely a wonderful change has come over it since we went into Retreat? Not a leaf moves upon the trees; not a bird twitters on the boughs; a lurid haze shuts in the valley and seems to palsy every living thing. Let us go up the side of the hill and see if the distant horizon be as ruddy and as clouded."

The little valley in which stood the convent of San Martino was, indeed, completely shut out from the world by its high encircling ridge of rocks. It almost resembled the crater of an extinct volcano, so precipitous were its sides and so teeming the vegetation which crowded the bottom of the little basin. Orchards of almond trees and of every fruit bowed their loaded branches towards the ashen soil of the plain. Higher up, dark woods of noble

Italian pines stood out before the jagged rocks; and the nakedness even of these was partly concealed by the rich hues of flowers that trailed their blossoming stems along the natural terraces, or shot out from every crevice and fell, in festoons, down to the lower ridges. By a winding path they ascended the flowery bank. Corazza still wandered restlessly near them; plucking flower after flower, and as quickly casting each away with the wilfulness of one whose thoughts were far distant and who was dissatisfied with her forced companionship with persons in whose feelings she could not sympathize. She had, however, just resolved to put an end to her state of uncertainty and boldly to apply to the reputed saint and prophet for information and guidance in the love which herself had suggested, when they reached the top of the ridge, where their attention was

suddenly arrested by the sounds that came up to them from the city.

Palermo, indeed, was not visible with that distinctness with which the eye generally pierces through the clear transparent atmosphere of Sicily. A mist, which might be produced by a summer blight, weighed heavily o'er all the land. The hot scirocco wind was blowing, and added to the sultriness of the air. But through this dull and heavy atmosphere, uprose shouts and sounds from the city, at the foot of the hills, such as had never before startled those peaceful solitudes. Thousands seemed to shout at once, and the discordant jangling of bells from every steeple proved that the whole city was possessed with wild exultation, terror, or rebellion.

“What is it, lady? What is it?” asked Corazza, eagerly. “You who can tell the future, can surely explain wherefore I have

been kept in that dull convent, when all the world was so strangely astir?"

"For thine own good, maiden: to keep thee out of mischief or of harm's way; and it would well befit thee even now to thank God for the mercy He was willing to show thee, and to pray Him to avert the danger which is at hand. I warned thee to pray, but thou wouldst not. Thy worldly mind resisted the call of grace. Twice have I been made to interpose in thy behalf. I prayed to God even now that He would not leave thee to thine own wilfulness. But the hour of penance is at hand; may it avail to turn thy thoughts to that heaven from which prosperity has so estranged them!"

She spoke with a stern wildness, such as might well have impressed the simple peasants who had resorted to her with an idea of supernatural power and inspiration.

Corazza, however, was hardened against any such feelings. She struggled not to be overawed ; and she forced her swelling throat to utter a tremulous laughter in derision of the pious admonition of the saint.

“ Ha! ha! ha!” repeated a loud voice behind the party, “ I thank thee, maiden, for thy gift of prophecy, which gives into my power her I sought, and has not even availed to save thyself from the vengeance of Abderachman. I told thee, when thou didst thwart me once before, that we should meet again.”

Thus speaking, the outlaw and his band rushed from the brushwood. With either hand, Abderachman seized the wrist of Corazza and of the unknown princess, while two or three of his fellows stood around Theresa. The others held the horses amongst the trees.

“For pity’s sake, for heaven’s sake, let me go!” cried Corazza, struggling violently.

“Nay, signorina, the holy saint here, just now, said that you were no votary of heaven. Why then appeal to it against one who wishes you well?”

“Let me go, I say!” persisted the little lady, stamping her tiny foot with passion. “Dost thou know who I am? Not all the world will be able to hide thee from my father’s vengeance,—from the vengeance of the Lord High Admiral of Admirals.”

“Alack, pretty one,” replied the outlaw, “the name of the Lord High Admiral has lost its power to charm. Hear you not the shouts that greet his murderer, your betrothed?”

“Murdered! and by Matteo! For the love of God, explain thyself,” cried Corazza wildly. “It is impossible!”

“Aye, signorina, it should have been so,” replied Abderachman. “But he was unworthy of your love. You shall come along with me, and I will find you a more deserving husband.”

“Man, I adjure thee by the blessed Mother of God to explain thyself,” said Theresa solemnly.

“It is even as I say, mistress,” replied the bandit. “Majone is slain by Matteo of Taverna, as he calls himself. For the last two days, Palermo has been in an uproar of delight. All his kinsfolk are in prison; and, I fear me, most of his treasure is pillaged: but our little signorina here, will, I trust, be able to tell me of some hidden store; and, if not, she is a treasure herself with which I must console me.”

Theresa turned her, weeping, to Rosalia. “Oh, benedetta,” she said, “God sent you to call her into the convent away from the

scene of woe. Oh, save her now! Save her now!"

"Calm thyself, dear Theresa," replied the princess: "we are all in the hands of God."

"Nay, by Allah, you are all in my hands now!" scoffingly exclaimed Abderachman: "and though it is not very likely that Master Matteo Bonello will interfere with us again, we will move on at once, with your good pleasure. Here, Harem," he continued, addressing one of his followers: "Do thou and half the men take the horses to—thou knowest where: and then rejoin us at the cave. We must not go out of reach of Palermo while these doings last. Now signora, now Santa What's-your-name, whoever you are, *en avant!* as the Normans say. The road is rather rough: but the Seraglio I take you to is as strong as Alcazar; and you shall not

want for food while it can be had for the taking."

Rosalia silently made a sign of resignation to Theresa: and, without further expostulation, they set forward, surrounded by their captors.

The track they followed skirted now the sides and now the ridges of the continuous mountain, winding amid the tangled copse-wood or through more open glades where forest trees spread their boughs high overhead. At times, it led them along ledges of the hill side, hanging like shelves over abysses far beneath, and from which the eye of any one but a mountainer would have recoiled dizzily. At times, a steep precipitous rock rose up on their right hand like a wall, and hung out wreaths of flowering plants and brambles above them. Everywhere, the purple convolvulus trailed its glowing flowers upon the ground.

Indian figs, prickly pears and aloes, sprang from every cleft in the mountain. The party were all young and strong; and they advanced at a quick pace, considering the broken nature of the ground: for Abderachman openly professed his anxiety to get back to Palermo so soon as he should have left his prisoners in the place of safety to which he was taking them, and have obtained from Corazza sufficient information to guide his search for her father's treasures.

"It is no use keeping the secret, bella ragazza," he said with more than his usual bold presumptuous look. "If not mine, they will fall into the hands of the king, for whom you cannot feel much love after his treatment of your family: unless, indeed, your late friend, Matteo of Taverna, seize them to adorn the Countess of Catanzaro."

“To adorn the Countess Clemence!” exclaimed the lady eagerly and with flashing eyes.

“Aye,” replied the outlaw. “Knew you not that he has delivered her from her imprisonment in the Favara, and that the king will, doubtless, give her to him to reward him for having slain the father of his first betrothed.”

“Can this be true?” asked Corazza, stopping suddenly and seizing the arm of the Saracen with a convulsive grasp, while she looked up into his face with starting eye-balls.

“Not a doubt of it!” he repeated.

Her look grew, if possible, more intense; her gripe, if possible, more tight. Suddenly both relaxed: her black eye-lashes fell: her fingers assumed a yellow, tawny hue; and she fainted in the arms of Abderachman.

“That’s a dear ragazza!” he exclaimed, suddenly kissing her, while he seated her on a mossy stone beside the path.

Theresa was at her side in an instant. “Off, villain!” she exclaimed angrily; and she pushed him aside with a strength of arm that seemed almost unwomanly.

“By heavens, that arm ought to carry a lance!” exclaimed the outlaw good-humouredly. “However, mistress, you are right,” he added: “bring her to her senses. My time is not come yet.”

He took an iron skull-cap from the head of one of his men; and filling it with water that leaked from a crevice in the mountain side, dashed it suddenly in her face.

“Look up, pretty one!” he said. “Thou shalt have as good a man as Matteo of Taverna.” She opened her eyes and gazed heedlessly about her. “Thou shalt have

as good a man as Matteo of Taverna, I say," he repeated: "and one whose whole life shall be spent in avenging thee; or at least in warring against him who has betrayed thee."

A slight shudder came over her: and yet she forced herself to put on a smile as she rose quickly from the rock; and, without speaking, walked forward on the path before them. And soon they ascended into a more elevated region of the mountain, where vegetation was less luxuriant, and where the ridge, standing out towards the north, looked down upon the sea, apparently beneath their feet, and upon the splendid country on either side. They turned a shelving rock, and the whole glorious landscape of Palermo lay stretched out before them. There, at a distance of two miles, but just underneath them, so that the two miles seemed to be all ascent,

there lay the city at their feet, in all its varied beauty of land and sea. There were the rich gardens that surrounded it, climbing up the undulating hill sides. There, beyond, was the beautiful promontory of Begaria and the Colle; beaming dimly, like all the rest, through that strange mist which hung over all the land. It scarcely extended out to sea; for there, on the shining breast of that tideless ocean, uprose the Lipari Island and the fitful flame of ever-burning Stromboli. Before them, almost at the other extremity of the island, most mighty Etna upheaved its snow-white crest, contrasting strangely with the glowing southern scenery around, and with that hot scirocco wind. A low moan like thunder seemed to break around them—so difficult was it to judge whether it came from above them or from below.

“Now, ladies, now signorina,” said Ab-

derachman impudently, and regardless of the rushing sound of thunder: "now you all know where you are—you all know that we stand upon my Monte Pellegrino that the lazy dwellers in the city yonder gaze up at in wonder, deeming its summit quite inaccessible. And so it is to heavy Norman feet. But we Saracens still hold some fastnesses in the country: and you are welcome to one of the homes of Abderachman."

As he spoke, he seized a hand of the Princess Rosalia and of Corazza; and, dragging them round a corner of the shelving rock, showed the mouth of a wide cavern, whose depths the eye could not discover.

Half-a-dozen flashes of forked lightning broke simultaneously through the sky, from the direction of Mount Etna, and interwove their lines of fire.

“Welcome to the Alcazar of Abderachman,” repeated the outlaw: “come in and let us refresh ourselves. The holy Prophet will not grudge us a goblet of wine on so festive an occasion.”

“Back, man, in the name of the Holy Virgin,” exclaimed Rosalia, indignantly breaking from his grasp.

“Nay, nay, signorina,” persisted the Saracen, again stepping towards her; “men do say that you are something of a prophet yourself: I have always followed one prophet, and am willing to believe in you as a second. Scorn not, therefore, to admit me amongst your worshipers.”

“Hark!” cried Rosalia, drawing up her tall slim figure to its full height, and starting to the edge of a rock near them that overhung the precipice. “Hark!” she said, extending her arm in the direction of Etna, and gazing, like one inspired with

knowledge beyond human ken. "Hark ! and tremble at the bidding of the God of heaven !"

She cast herself on her knees where she stood : and with her two arms uplifted above the valley, she ejaculated, "Father, into thy hands I commend myself !"

Abderachman did, indeed, tremble. Dropping the hand of Corazza, he and his fellows staggered together to the side of the overhanging rock and leaned against it like weak women, as they felt the mountain shake under them. Suddenly two new craters upheaved their columns of ruddy fire from amid the snowy sides of distant Etna. Bright, and brightly seen across all the length of the island, they shot up into the clouded eastern sky. Countless flashes of forked lightning played amongst the billows of floating ashes, and streaked their murky depths as if they had been masses

of summer thunder clouds. Again and again the earth shook more violently. The sea rolled back nearly half a mile from the beach beneath their feet: then, hissing and foaming as if it were based upon a heated furnace, it again rushed forward and spread beyond its former limits. They saw the buildings topple over in the city below them; they heard the cries of the wretched inhabitants. Wretched, indeed, to be overtaken by such a calamity, whilst all amongst them was festive joy and noise and clang:—murderous festivity, which had prevented them from noticing the warnings which the dread volcano had given for the last two days!

There was a cessation in the trembling of the earth, though the pillars of fire from the mountain rose higher and higher into the unclouded sky, while heaving billows of ashes were carried, by the wind, over

the distant eastern seas. The sea rushed back and contracted itself far within its usual limits. Abderachman reverently approached the Virgin Hermit.

“God is, indeed, thine avenger!” he said. “Forgive me, maiden. Let thy God becalm the earth; and allow me to depart in peace.”

Rosalia made the sign of the cross over her breast, as if concluding a prayer; and then arose from her knees.

“Foolish infidel!” she said, “deem not that God has sent such a scourge over this fair country at my bidding, or that, at my bidding, He would withhold His wrath. That which He was about to do, He did in time to save me and to make thee dread His vengeance. I feared thee not, Saracen; for I knew Who was my protector.”

“Protected, indeed, thou art; and never

more will Abderachman molest her whom the Lord favours."

"Thou must do more, Saracen;" exclaimed Rosalia, as if moved by a sudden thought. "Thou must give up to me this cavern and this mountain, and swear never more to come near its summit."

"What would you do in so frightful a wilderness?" expostulated the outlaw.

"What! Dost thou still doubt that God will protect me?" exclaimed the virgin. "Wouldst thou have more evidence of His power?"

"It shall not need, holy saint," interposed the infidel, anxiously: for it chanced that the earth, just then, gave another heave, and the sea again boiled up at its motion. "It shall not need. I resign to you the cavern of Monte Pellegrino."

"And thou swearest that neither thou nor thy followers will ever more approach

it, nor reveal to living soul that I am its inhabitant ?”

“ So may Allah protect me, I swear it,” replied the Saracen fervently.

“ Go, then,” said the maiden : “ go : and beware lest some worse thing happen to thee.”

Abderachman hesitated for some seconds. Then turning to the Lady Corazza he said, “ Methinks that you, signorina, would not wish to make your solitary home on Monte Pellegrino. Let me, therefore, guide you through its wilderness.”

“ And what pledge give you of your faith ?” asked Theresa, stepping forwards.

“ I see not, mistress, that I need give any,” replied the outlaw, with much of his former freedom. “ You and the young lady must both go with me, unless you wish to lead the lives of hermits here ;

which I am quite certain will not suit her fancy, whatever it might do thine own."

"What am I to do, dear lady? Give me your heavenly counsel," entreated Theresa, turning to the Lady Rosalia.

"May she confide in thee, Saracen?" asked the princess.

"I have told the suspicious woman so already," said Abderachman. "I swear to thee, mistress, that thou shalt be free to go where and when thou wilt."

This assurance pacified Theresa. She addressed her to Rosalia, while the outlaw, turning to one of his followers, whispered: "I swore to let the oldest one go, mark you. I said nothing of the young one."

"Oh, think again, dearest lady," said Theresa to the princess, "think again on the terrible resolve which I see that you are forming. Surely, surely you would not condemn yourself to solitude in this wilderness?"

“I have told thee before, my friend, that solitude exists not for me. God and his angels are ever near me. The holy Virgin hears my every prayer, and wafts it to her blessed Son. Why, to live in such a place as this, is to live almost at heaven’s threshold! Look down on that unhappy city, and think of the hopes, the plans, the fortunes, the friendships overthrown during the last dreadful hour. Here my hopes and my plans must all aspire to heaven: there I lay up all my fortune; the saints of heaven are my only friends. Let the earth crumble, these can never fail me. With these hopes, with these friendships, I can never be alone. I told thee even now that it was my purpose to flee to some more remote wilderness, in order to escape from the applications that followed me on the Monte Quisquina. God seems to have sent this infidel to show me a retreat

which I believe to be unknown to all men."

"But how will you support yourself, dear lady? On what will you live? with what will you be clothed?"

"Be not solicitous, saying what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or where-with shall we be clothed," repeated the princess sternly. "Thou hast heard that saying, Theresa; tempt me not, therefore; but go thy ways and leave me with God."

"Only remember, dearest lady," reiterated her faithful attendant, "remember that, should you chance to want any thing, the convent of San Martino is at hand. You have lived so long in the mountains, that you will, I trust, be able to find your way back to it."

"Now, signora, we must be off, an it please you," exclaimed Abderachman, in a

voice that broke harshly upon the gentle words of the females.

Theresa seized the hand of the princess and her tears began to flow fast: but with strong emotion, Rosalia cast herself on her neck and kissed her often and affectionately.

“Farewell!” she said, tenderly: “may my last remembrances of my kind be of thee, thou good and pure-hearted friend of my childhood! Be what thou hast ever been, and God will bless thee. Farewell—farewell for ever. Pray for thy Rosalia.”

As she spoke, she tore herself from the arms of her humble friend; and turning abruptly round, darted into the wide cavern beside her. Theresa stood for a few moments as one overcome and stupefied: till Abderachman, gently touching her arm with the unslung bow he carried in his hand, recalled her to herself. She went quickly to the side of Corazza.

“What a holy saint she is for one so young!” she exclaimed. “I would that she had given you her blessing before she fled.”

“Nonsense!” said Corazza, disdainfully. “Cannot one be a saint without living in such a wilderness as this?”

“Heaven forbid that I should deny it! and may you, Corazza, accomplish the more difficult undertaking, and be a saint in the world!” replied Theresa meekly.

Escorted by the same Saracens who had brought them to Monte Pellegrino, they now began to retrace their steps along the broken and circuitous track from that cavern to which a flight of marble steps and a colonnade, a mile long, now leads the people of Palermo to the shrine of their patron saint. The tremblings of the earth had ceased; and a brisk wind had blown away the vapour that had overspread the

sky during the earlier part of the day. The huge mountain in the distance still belched forth its dreadful flames ; and wide channels of red-hot lava were dimly seen melting the white covering of snow that had mantled all its summit. The distance was too great for them to be distinguished except by the displacement of these otherwise-eternal snows. Down to devoted Catania they sped upon their errand of destruction ; and soon buried the greater part of that hapless city below their rivers of molten rock. All this, however, could only be guessed by Abderachman and his companions ; for the summit merely of the mountain was visible from the heights of Pellegrino. The destruction occasioned by the earthquake was more widely spread : and eagerly the Saracens paused to note its fatal effects, on the beauteous city beneath them, whenever a turn in the road

or its passage over a projecting eminence gave them a view of Palermo. Confusedly they observed many of those changes which now perplex the inquiries of antiquaries. Palermo has often suffered from earthquakes; but on this day occurred those great changes in the topography of the town and country of which eight centuries have not quite obliterated the traces. With many an exclamation of dread surprise, Abderachman marked that the sea returned not to its former limits: but that disrupted hillocks closed up, in a great degree, the channels of those little rivers whose confluence with the ocean used to divide the central portion of the city from its two suburbs. The cathedral no longer loomed sternly beside the water's edge; and the Torre di Baych, whose lofty keep had marked the extreme point of the peninsula, now lay a mass of ruins at

some distance from the still foaming waters.

“Hasten, bella signorina, hasten as much as you can,” he said. “Brave work must be going on below ; and I would fain take my share in it. Haram, do thou hurry forward and bring the horses and the other men to the Bocca di Falco. I will not now harass you, beautiful Corazza, on the subject on which we before spoke. This earthquake will give William and his new favourite other matter to think of than to seek for your poor father’s riches. You shall tell me what you know of them hereafter.”

“But are you not taking us back to Palermo?” interposed Theresa anxiously. “Remember your oath, Saracen.”

“I swore to let you go back, mistress,” replied the outlaw ; “and you are welcome to do so as quickly as you like. But I am

too much devoted to the lady Corazza to take her to a city where thousands are thirsting for the blood of all her kin; and where, if she escaped from their vengeance, her only home would be in the dungeons of the palace. Fear not, signorina; I will not so desert you," he said; and he gave his hand frankly to the damsel.

Whether she was moved by fear or gratitude, it is impossible to say: but she did not refuse to touch the infidel's proffered hand. He affected to consider the act as a pledge of friendship; and that it established an understanding between him, the outlawed Saracen claimant of a forfeited barony, and one who, two days before, would have accepted with haughtiness the homage of princes—unless they who tendered it had happened to strike her fancy. But in those two days, she herself had become a fugitive: she had

learned that her betrothed had deserted her: and her present protector was pledged to avenge his own and her quarrel upon him. She concealed her loathing as the Saracen raised her hand to his lips.

Shortly afterwards, they were met by the rest of his little troop with the horses. Theresa would not desert her charge. Both were quickly mounted: and at a pace which showed thorough contempt for the dangers of the mountain road, they dashed under the overhanging boughs of the forest.

CHAPTER VI.

“ Lorsque je vois un amant,
Il cache en vain son tourment;
A le trahir tout conspire :
Sa langueur, son embarras,
Tout ce qu’il peut faire ou dire—
Même ce qu’il ne dit pas.”

La Fosse.

ON escaping from her imprisonment in the Saracenic palace of the Favara, the Countess Clemence had, as we have seen, sought refuge in her uncle’s castle of Mistretto. It was at no great distance from Palermo : and a brisk ride of three hours through the clear moonlight had brought her within its friendly portal. How the sturdy warrior rejoiced, as he proudly clasped his noble-minded niece to his ample chest ! And how proud felt she herself, the pant-

ing fugitive, to think that she had recovered her freedom by her own dauntless resolution and by her trust in protecting Providence, and had so thwarted all the wiles of a despotic and unprincipled minister! Her cheeks glowed no less with the exercise she had undergone in the bright midnight air, than with the consciousness of triumph. Her eyes shot flashes of unwonted fire; and danced amid the tears of pleasure that, at times, suffused their brilliancy. She was a very child in the freshness of her feelings: and the infantine amiability of her character blended strangely with the determined and masculine judgment which reflection, and the dangers and vicissitudes of the period, had imparted. A child in freshness of feeling, a man in resolution, an aspiring and tender-hearted woman in the more gentle sympathies of her sex, she stood joyfully before

the blazing fire in the great hall of Mistretto, and the old rafters reechoed the merry laughter with which she recounted to her uncle the history of her masquerade, and described the dread of the guards who had stalked trembling from her enchanted lance.

“Here, however,” she said, leading Richard MacMardagh forward by the hand, “here, uncle Tommaso, is the champion whom I especially recommend to you. Had it not been for his assistance, Clemence of Catanzaro might, ere long, have wandered, a real ghost, through the galleries of that hateful prison.”

The old knight folded the Irishman to his breast; and then giving him a friendly slap on the back that made his teeth shake in his head, bade him go and help himself from the flasks of wine and the cold pasty that still encumbered the chesnut

table—the remains of the last night's supper.

Nor need we doubt that the Countess, when conducted with becoming state to her sleeping apartment, did good justice to the substantial fare and the smoking possets of spiced wine that were brought to her. Some of our readers may have imagined that we had turned our attention to other personages of our story, because she, our heroine, was disabled by the effects of her midnight bath and lengthened ride in her dripping attire. The highborn dames of the days of which we write, knew not such feminine weaknesses as are deemed attractive in our own monotonous times. Their constitutions were hardened to the exercises they had to endure: and no soldier ever laughed more lightly over perils past than did the Countess while she enjoyed an ample supper beside a blazing

hearth, and lightly chatted with her uncle.

And now the excitement, caused by her sudden arrival, was at an end. The castle of Mistretto had sunk back into the silence of the early dawn. The measured tramp of the sentry within the battlements was the only sound that came upon the listener's ear. The embers burned low on the hearth of our heroine's chamber; and only lighted up, with occasional and fitful flames, the bright gilding of the embossed and stamped leathers that lined the rough walls of the room. Wearily she betook herself to her pillow and gave full access to the crowding thoughts which the events of the last eight-and-forty hours sent teeming over her feverish head and throbbing heart. From her uncle, she had heard of the defection of Matteo of Taverna from the cause of the admiral: had

heard that he had joined the rebellious barons, and that, in return for his adhesion, they had pledged themselves to promote his union with herself. She thought over the long and earnest attentions he had paid her: she thought over his temporary desertion while she herself refused or delayed to sanction his suit, and while Majone artfully made him believe that life and property and resistance to Abderachman's claims depended upon an alliance with himself and Corazza: she thought over this episode in his devotion with pain, it is true; but blissfully, also, she thought over his bearing at his last hurried visit to Beni-zekher: and she rejoiced that it was by the instrumentality of his own squire that she had now recovered her freedom. Cheering and soothing and agitating fancies and hopes of youth, how pleasant to feel ye flutter around our couch, and to

drop calmly to sleep while your rosy pinions weigh gently upon our eyelids, and reflect, even beneath their folds, varied and dancing hues of bright and happy augury!

On the following day, the sun rode high and triumphantly through an unclouded noonday sky, and Clemence of Catanzaro had not yet left her sleeping apartment. Her brave uncle had stilled the varied noises that usually pervaded every small inhabited Norman fortress, in order that no sound might break her needed rest. She had arisen, at length, and was marveling at the unwonted stillness of his always boisterous household, when suddenly a loud challenge resounded from the portal of the castle, and the clatter of a horse's hoofs was soon after heard in the paved court-yard within. A few moments elapsed—moments of agitation to the Countess, who already began to complain secretly, and to charge Taverna with loi-

tering on his way to seek her favour. The heavy riding-boots of her uncle rang upon the stone stairs that wound up to her room. He approached nearer and nearer.

“All’ erta ! all’ erta !” he cried. “Up, up, fair niece, and hear the joyful news. Matteo is awake at last. By Saint Vic he has shown that he has good Norman blood in his veins. Up ! up ! Clemence. By my faith, he deserves to win the favour of a more sprightly dame.”

“What is it, uncle ?” asked our heroine half opening her door, and, with a look of some displeasure, striving to check the old soldier’s further allusions to matters which seemed, to her, too sacred to be thus lightly blazoned forth. “What is the matter ?” she repeated.

“Matter, child ? nothing is the matter. Long live Matteo of Taverna, say I ! He has slain Majone with his own hand.”

“Santa Maria! what news!” ejaculated the Countess joyfully and quite unmoved by any of those modern feminine sympathies which some of our critics, more deeply read than we are in the habits and feelings of the times, will, perhaps, tell us to be the inalienable accompaniments of womanhood. “Santa Maria, what news! Could it only be true!”

“But it is true, I tell thee,” reiterated her uncle. “All Palermo vouches for the deed, and tries to testify its gratitude to its deliverer. Finish thine attire, Clemence; and say a double rosary to thank Heaven for having made thy dreaming knight wake up into a hero.”

“I will,” she cheerfully replied, closing the door. “I will; and for his own safety also,” she added, sighing thoughtfully.

The prayers were said. The attire was finished with more than usual care, and

with all the appliances which could be collected from the wardrobes of the female attendants in the bachelor's castle: and after hearing all the particulars of the transaction which had been gleaned from the first messenger, she mounted to the battlements in the hope, if we must own it, in the hope that he whose fame every lip proclaimed, would soon be seen spurring towards her temporary retreat. We need not say that she looked out for him in vain: for, in a few hours, Richard Mac Mardagh (who had sought his lord with the early dawn), returned to acquaint her that he had hastened to put his castle of Cacabo in a state of defence, and that a day, at least, must elapse before he could throw himself at her feet.

And in arming and provisioning his own castle, that day was also spent by the valiant knight Tommaso; for he naturally

anticipated that his niece would be pursued, and that her enemies would entertain no good will towards himself for having received her. On the next day, they heard of the wonderful reconciliation between the king and the conspirators. Tommaso himself had been in the procession, and had scarcely left the walls of Palermo when the fearful earthquake, which we have noted from Monte Pellegrino, made the buildings around him topple to their foundations, and urged him and the other Barons to disperse as quickly as possible through the open country, and to speed to render such assistance as might be needed at their own several homes. That of Mistretto, lay not in the current of the shock; but the castle of Cacabo had suffered severely; and, for another day, Taverna's presence was required within its shattered walls. At length the necessary

orders were given, and at the head of a goodly body of followers he hastened towards the temporary abode of the Countess. Sieur Tommaso met him at the portal: and with boisterous and joyful greetings, led him into the great hall where he expected to find his niece. She was not there.

“Follow, sir knight, follow monseigneur,” he cried. “Methinks she might have received you with the state due to your services; but she is a wilful child. Let us seek her out, instead of losing time in sending messengers hither and thither.”

Lustily the old man called out the name of the Countess, and sought her from room to room through the little fortress, followed by Taverna, who, with a throbbing heart, endeavoured to check what he considered to be the unfeeling boisterousness of his guide. A sentinel, at length, put them upon her track; and after mounting a

little winding staircase in the turret in which was the apartment assigned to her, they found her seated on the flat leads above, her embroidery in her hand.

“Oh monseigneur,” she cried, and springing from her seat: “this is a joyful surprise! How long have you been at Mistretto?”

Taverna bowed bashfully over the hand she extended to him so frankly: while old Tommaso exclaimed: “Surprise, indeed! why, Clemence, thou *must* have seen him riding up, from this very spot.”

“If I had looked for him, uncle, perhaps;” she replied archly.

“Looked for him! by Heavens, thou shouldest have been all eyes for thy deliverer.”

“Indeed, seigneur of Taverna,” she said, “I owe my freedom to your gallant squire. Had not his exertions been made in the

cause of a lady, he would well merit to receive his spurs from your hands."

"By no other service could he so well deserve them," exclaimed Taverna. "By no other could he so recommend himself to me."

"Ho there! Riccardo Mardano!" cried old Tommaso at the top of his powerful voice, leaning over the battlement of the turret and signing to the Irishman in the court below, "Ho, Riccardo; come up and receive the reward of thy gallantry. By my faith," he continued, turning to our hero, "every soldier in Christendom will envy the lad that he should have been honoured by the slayer of Majone. Your name and fame will surpass that of the great Count."

"I did but a deed of justice in defence of ourselves; and, if the beautiful Clemence will permit me to say so, far more in her

defence. But for the news of her imprisonment which Riccardo sent to me in Italy, I know not that I should have so soon broken through the trammels wound around me."

"What a pretty speech!" cried the Countess gaily. "Only somewhat difficult to be believed by those who remember—who"—

"Here, Riccardo," said her uncle, interrupting her as the Irishman came on the platform: "here; kneel down and receive the honours of knighthood from the noble baron. My sword will serve the turn, for lack of a better, monseigneur; and Clemence will spare him that scarf, since he did his devoir in her service."

"For what is it, monseigneur, that it is proposed so to honour me?" asked Mac Mardagh with respect, but with self-possession.

“For a deed that showed as gallant a heart as any feat in arms could evince; for saving the noble Countess from the Favara,” replied his lord.

“For swimming like a duck or a water-dog!” ejaculated Richard. “Thanks, monseigneur: but Irishmen must win knight-hood by other feats than such as that.”

“Ungracious boy!” cried old Tommaso, “dost thou question the ability of Norman knights to judge of feats of arms?”

“I question nothing, signore,” replied Richard: “But, under your favour, I will not expose myself to be jeered by them as the ‘Merman’ or the ‘Water-knight;’ or to be distinguished by any other equally-descriptive title.”

“There are few who would not envy thee the opportunity of having acquired the distinction;” expostulated the baron while he looked at Clemence.

“ And for nothing on earth, would I exchange the remembrance of the conduct of the noble countess,” the Irishman gallantly replied. “ But that sentiment is for myself. If I win rank, it shall be at the sword’s point—for deeds in arms which a Norman will honour. None less will satisfy me.”

“ He is right, uncle,” interposed the countess: “ and you may safely let him have his own way. I prophesy that he will soon do deeds that even his own ambition will admit to be deserving.”

“ Enough, Riccardo,” said his patron: “ go on as thou hast begun, and all will be well.”

With a grateful obeisance to all three, the Irishman left the platform.

“ And now, beautiful countess,” continued Taverna, speaking so as not to be overheard by the elder knight; “ I feel

that I can put in no plea to your favour, such as that which I envy this poor wanderer for having achieved. Let me then only pray, in the first place, for your forgiveness."

"Forgiveness, monseigneur?" replied Clemence, with a tremulousness of voice which she vainly attempted to conceal, "you and I are too old friends for either to have sinned against the other."

"Not so, dear madama," replied the baron more gently, "you *would* never know me, you *would* never know the feelings that had grown up so long within me; and thus you drove me to belie myself: to belie myself because you yourself *would* always doubt me."

"And did I not judge you truly?" asked the Countess, rallying her spirit. "How long is it since I told you, at Beni-zekher, that you would carry your vows to the first

Sicilian lady you met? and lo, within two hours, or two days at furthest, you were betrothed to the daughter of the Lord Admiral! Oh, fie upon you, to have killed your own father-in-law!"

"I cannot bear this, lady; your sport agonizes me!" cried Taverna, turning away.

"Help, uncle, for the love of heaven!" exclaimed Clemence, "Matteo is going to precipitate himself over the battlement. Do not, I pray you!" she said, laughing.

"What is all this about?" said the old knight, stepping up and taking an arm of each. "You thought I was a stupid old fellow for not following the Irish boy down stairs, and leaving you to yourselves. Did you not? But I knew I should be wanted; I knew I should be wanted. This niece of mine, monsignore, has a spirit that you will never be able to manage until I show you how. Be quiet, madama," he continued, as

she playfully struggled to release her hand from his grasp: "And you, too, signor barone, you had better spare your professions; and listen, both of ye, to me. The fact of the matter is, that neither of you knew his own mind, or, if you did, would own it. Thy flightiness sent the noble knight in the way of Majone's wiles; and he, despairing of you, and to save, as he thought, his life, ran into the trap."

"What *are* you talking about, uncle Tommaso?" exclaimed the Countess. "Majone is dead; and I pray you not to bring back his hateful memory."

"But I will bring it back," continued the old knight. "I will remind thee that if Majone be dead, it is the Baron of Taverna who has delivered the world from the monster. He has thus made every reparation that man could make: and if thou hadst cause to complain of him for

seeking Majone's child, he has given sure proof that thou canst now have no cause to be jealous of her influence."

"Me complain! Me jealous!" cried the Countess. "Indeed, uncle, you are dreaming, this morning. The earthquake must have strangely shaken your nerves! Unhand me; I will not stay a moment longer."

"Indeed, indeed, beautiful countess"—commenced Taverna, when the old knight again checked him.

"Spare your protestations, monsignore. You never found them do you any good with this flighty lady. I shall manage matters my own way: I will make ye understand one another quicker than ye would do so without me, for I will make you, at all events, speak somewhat plainer than you have ever done as yet. Signora Contessa of Catanzaro, I have shown how

this noble lord was inveigled by the late admiral, and how he burst the bonds that were to have tied him to Corazza, and atoned for that jealousy of which thou didst never feel a pang—never ! The barons of Italy and Sicily have pledged themselves to him that they will compel the king to consent to his union with thee—”

“ With me ! Santa Maria, wherefore with me ? Why am I to be bartered away in exchange for the life of an old traitor ? ” cried the Countess in mock surprise.

“ The bargain has been struck,” continued the uncle. “ Wilt thou agree to it or wilt thou not ? If not, I will send word to our friends, who are prepared to enforce it, that their services are no longer needed ; and, to king William, that thou art ready to return to thy prison in the Favara.”

“Oh, not to the Favara, uncle. I should be so afraid of the ghost!” expostulated the Countess in a piteous tone, while she put her two hands together and smiling held them up before his face.

“Monseigneur, she is yours,” said the old man, patting her on her beautiful head. “I thought I should bring her round. Now is your time.”

“Now and always be it my time, dear Clemence!” exclaimed the young man, dropping on one knee and seizing her hand, which he pressed fervently to his lips: “now and always be it my time to thank you and to declare and prove the love and devotion I have never ceased to feel—”

“Except when Corazza was by,” archly interposed the Countess.

Signor Tommaso held up his finger menacingly. “I shall cut this matter

short," he said, "before you two again mar all. Monseigneur, you see that you are accepted. When will it please you that I and your other friends should accompany you to the Alcazar to ask William's consent?"

"To-morrow, gallant sir, if you will so far grace me;" replied Taverna. "May it not be to-morrow, belle Clemence?"

"Oh I have no voice in the matter," replied the Countess tossing her head; "all the barons of Italy and Sicily have condescended to trouble themselves about me. I cannot oppose such wise judges of horsemanship and of hearts."

"Heaven's blessing upon thee!" Taverna cried with fervour, as he threw an arm around her and pressed her to his heart. Her head lay, for a few moments, against his shoulder, while he imprinted a kiss upon her marble forehead. She looked up

into his noble face, and a tear of gladness dimmed her lustrous eyes. She gently unclasped her lover's arm; and then, pressing his hand affectionately, without speaking a word, she darted down the narrow stairs from the platform.

CHAPTER VII.

“O, world thy slippery turns! Friends now fast sworn,
Whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart,
Whose hours, whose bed, whose meal and exercise
Are still together; who twin, as 'twere, in love
Unseparable, shall within this hour,
On a dissension of a doit, break out
To bitterest enmity.”

Coriolanus.

“BY all the fiends in Etna, I swear that I will not be disturbed by such noises!” cried king William starting from his couch, as some heavy substance, after rolling along the corridors which reverberated with a hundred echoes, struck against the door of his apartment and burst it rudely open. “How now, young scoundrel,” he continued, as little Ruggiero and the two other children rushed into the room; “how darest thou to raise such a clatter?”

“We were only making an earthquake, papa,” replied the eldest child timidly.

“Was it not exactly like the rumbling of the ground, papa?” asked the second boy.

“I care not what it was like, William,” replied the king in a mollified tone of voice: then, addressing the elder boy, he continued more angrily, “but I warn thee that I will not allow my seat to be shaken under me by thy pranks.”

“Do not so chide the poor child,” interposed queen Margaret. “I wish you could forget the crazy Giovacchino’s prophecy, and keep your anger for the rebels who deserve to feel its effects.”

“True; and by the holy face of Lucca this matter must be enquired into,” said the king, addressing the Elect of Syracuse. “If this money can be claimed from the Baron of Taverna, it must be secured. Be-

think you that it would be enough to repair all the damage which the earthquake has done to La Rocca."

"True, your grace: but it were scarcely seemly to press for it. The service that the baron has rendered, has endeared him to the people"—

"Who will reward him for it," interposed the Gaieto Pietro. "Take my word, that he did not murder the poor honest Lord Admiral for nothing."

"What could be his object?" asked the king.

"To curry that favour with the people which his reverence tells us he has already obtained;" answered the chamberlain. "Such favour has, ere now, led to thrones."

"What meanest thou, Pietro?" asked William.

"Only what I have often told your grace: that Majone was a true servant, and

that this Bonello murdered him because he stood between him and the crown he covets."

"He did, indeed, stand in the way!" said the Elect. "Nay, my lord chamberlain, it has been proved that Majone had prepared a diadem to fit his own brows."

"And I can disprove the charge," reiterated the Gaieto. "If the king will permit, I will bring one before him even now who will refute the slander."

"Any thing you like," said the king yawning, and throwing himself again, at full length, on the couch. Here he half closed his eyes, and beating the devil's tattoo with his foot, languidly awaited what should happen.

The Gaieto cast a furtive but triumphant glance at queen Margaret, where she stood in the embrasure of a window; and clapping his hands, summoned to the door

Adinulfo, the favourite chamberlain of the late admiral.

“Is the infidel artizan in waiting?” he asked, with the scorn which a renegade often shows to the followers of a faith which he falsely professes to have abandoned. He was answered in the affirmative: and, a few minutes afterwards, the Saracen, Azab, stood in the royal presence, cringing with every eastern demonstration of terror and reverence. King William looked on with half-opened eyes.

“Now, good fellow,” said the Gaieto: “tell us what thou knowest about these royal jewels.”

“May it please your grace, may I be permitted to speak and live?” asked the artizan appealingly.

“Be quick, man, for I am going to sleep,” replied the king drowsily. Then having turned to look at the face of the

witness, he said, "What a poor starved devil he is! Take him to the buttery, good Adinulfo, and fill him with wine and venison."

"Let him give his evidence first," said the Bishop-elect of Syracuse. "I know this man. Speak, sirrah."

"Your reverence will, then, the less distrust his testimony," said the chamberlain. "Now, good Azab, say: what knowest thou of the jewels?"

"May it please your grace, I made them," answered the Saracen.

"By whose orders?" asked the bishop.

"By the orders of my lord High Admiral."

The king rose on his elbow and gazed in the face of the Saracen. He was just falling back again, when the Gaieto asked:

"For what purpose did he bid thee make them?"

“That he might present them to my lord the king on his birthday, next month.”

William started to his feet.

“How, sirrah! Why didst thou not tell me this before!” exclaimed the elect of Syracuse. But his further speech was interrupted by the king, who strode up and down the room, muttering curses deep and loud, mingled with terms of endearment to the memory of his favourite. The bishop stood silent, considering in his own mind how he could meet the new conspiracy which he well saw was organized in the palace amongst the adherents of the late admiral. The chamberlain and Caieto moved not nor spoke. They marked with exultation the anger of the king, and were willing to let it have its own way. Queen Margaret exchanged glances with the Saracens; and after a few seconds drew near

her husband. She artfully left the elder boy, Ruggiero, where he was playing with little Costanza in the corner of the room ; and drew forward the second, against whom she knew that his father entertained none of those feelings of jealousy which Giovacchino's prophecy had aroused in regard to the elder. She led him forward by the hand ; and, taking the arm of her husband, cast herself upon his breast.

“ Oh save thyself, William,” she cried sobbing, or seeming to sob ; “ and save these poor helpless children from the designs of traitors. It is useless to mourn for the admiral : perhaps it is as well that he should have been removed,” she artfully added, as she feared to reawaken his jealous feelings : “ he was, in truth, unpopular with the barons. But do not permit these overgrown barons to charge his memory with guilt, in order that they may ruin

thee and our children. For myself, I care not. A convent will always shelter a proscribed queen: but for the honour of the Norman name, and for the honour of the descendants of the Great Count, let not those who have so long been compelled to swear allegiance to thy race, overcome thee by the petty wiles of traitors."

"It is not very likely I should," muttered the king as he gently shook off Queen Margaret. "Let them but raise a lance, and they shall soon feel my vengeance."

"You are right, monseigneur," said the Bishop of Syracuse interposing. "Here is evidently treachery somewhere. I myself have no doubt of the falsehood of this infidel worker in gold: had he been a true man, he would have told the purpose for which he was ordered to make these jewels at first. But I will have him watched: and meanwhile I also advise that the move-

ments of the barons should be closely observed. I have no doubt of their present faith and of the treachery of Majone; but we must be prepared for all and weigh all closely. I would, moreover, beg your grace to remember that the diadem prepared by Majone was ornamented with the beaks and sterns of ships—more suited, methinks, to the Lord High Admiral than to the King of Sicily.”

This argument seemed to produce some effect upon the king; and the Gaieto, who had well learned to read his stolid features, hastened to neutralize its effect.

“And what sovereign is more entitled to claim dominion over the seas,” he said, “than him whom Italy, Sicily, and Africa obey;—whose galleys have shot their arrows into the very gardens of the emperor as they sailed triumphantly before the harbour of Constantinople?”

In such arguments and repartees, the morning wore away. In such a spirit of gossip and recrimination was the business of the state conducted. Wholly secluded from the gaze of his subjects, King William now never left the walls of his palace. surrounded by his wife and children and a few favourites, he received from them whatever suspicions they chose to instil into his inactive nature. He thought himself a domestic man: he was but a slothful one—too idle to break through the thrall of habit; or to open his mind to the different impressions which a more extended intercourse with his subjects would have imparted. Even within the walls of the palace, order and regularity existed not. The slaves and cunuchs, whom Majone and Queen Margaret had attached to their faction, only strove to keep off all those who might acquire any influence

that should interfere with their own sovereign sway. The high place now occupied in the Rocca by Adinulfo, the chamberlain of Majone, showed that the power of the late master-mind was still supreme within its walls.

The council of state, if we may so call it, was about to adjourn to the dinner-table, when the children at the window cried out that a brilliant cavalcade of knights was riding towards the palace.

“The handsome baron that killed the admiral is at the head of them,” cried Ruggiero. “Oh, how the people are cheering him! Oh how I should love to be cheered like that!”

And he clapped his hands with delight, till, in a burst of jealous passion, the king struck him smartly on the ear. He staggered away, weeping. The mob congregated around the cavalcade; and cheer

after cheer uprose to the honour of the "Deliverer of the kingdom". Between two dense masses of people, the barons rode on to the portal of the Rocca.

"I will not see them!" cried the king surlily. "I want my dinner: I want my siesta. Tell them they should have come earlier."

"Will your grace appoint any other time for them?" asked Adinulfo.

"No: I will not. Let them send word what they want. I am not attired to see any one."

"Perhaps, monseigneur, it were dangerous to refuse," said the Gaieto: adding artfully, "The people are so devoted to the Baron of Taverna that any slight put upon him might incense them fearfully."

"I will not hold the sceptre during their good pleasure or that of their favourite," said the king doggedly. "Send them away, Pietro."

“ Monseigneur, they will not be denied admittance,” exclaimed the door-keeper, Adinulfo, re-entering hurriedly; and, almost immediately afterwards, Simon of Policastro appeared at the threshold, leading forward Matteo of Taverna and most of the barons who had accompanied him, three days before, to the audience where such fair promises of reconciliation had been made on all sides.

“ Royal brother,” he said frankly, “ I, as High-Constable of the kingdom, answer for the faith of the Lord of Taverna and of our brother barons. The promise of eternal friendship, sworn three days ago, was too warm in their breasts for them to turn their horses’ heads from the Rocca, at the bidding of an infidel slave, without seeing their beloved sovereign.”

During this address, William had risen from his couch and had shuffled his feet

into his slippers and drawn his long morning robe around him. He stood like one who was ashamed of his attire—and still more ashamed of having been caught in such an undress: for we have before remarked upon the closeness with which the kings of Sicily delighted in public to copy the courtly forms of the emperors of the east.

“I should have had notice of this visit, that I might receive you with fitting ceremonial,” he muttered half audibly.

“No ceremonial is needed to accompany an act of favour,” replied the Count of Policastro. “We come here in a body,” he continued, “to crave your consent to the marriage of our good friend and deliverer, the Baron of Taverna, with your lordship’s kinswoman, the Countess of Catanzaro.”

“I thought he was betrothed to the

daughter of the man he murdered," said the king.

"My lord!" cried Taverna angrily, while he laid his hand upon his sword.

"In fair fight, mark you," replied the king hastily. "I impugn not his valour. Besides, it was decreed that poor Majone was a traitor: I pray heaven there be none others!"

"The daughter of an upstart traitor is no fitting mate for one of the first Norman barons of Sicily," exclaimed the Conte of Lesina sternly.

"Consent to this marriage with your noble kinswoman, my lord," said Ruggiero of Sanseverino, "and bind us all firmly in amity."

"You forget, my lords, that she holds wide and important fiefs!" exclaimed the king inconsiderately.

"And the traitor, Majone, would have

ruled that the countess should be prevented from marrying, that these might revert to the crown," observed the Conte di Lesina angrily. "Are we to be still enthralled by his maxims?"

"Sieur of Taverna," persisted the king after some hesitation, and without replying to the last inquiry; "Sieur of Taverna, your own lands are deeply indebted to the royal treasury."

"My lands, your grace! how so?" asked our hero in surprise.

"I find," continued William, "that they were charged with a heavy annual quit rent. This has not been paid for many years."

"I know nothing of it, my lord. I hold my lands as I received them from my fathers," answered Taverna.

"Well, gentlemen; I would not be discourteous; but our clock has pealed out

the hour of dinner," said the king. "I regret that I cannot bid you to stay and grace my board. I must pray you to let the subject of this conference rest."

He turned him and entered into conversation with the Gaieto.

"If your grace could keep them both without heirs, their baronies were worth a kingdom," whispered the latter.

"We will not, my lord, intrude upon your hospitality, although hospitality has been esteemed the virtue of Normans;" replied Ruggiero of Sanseverino to the king's last speech, which so jarred upon all their feelings and habits. "Thanks to the broad lands which our fathers carved out for us and for your grace, we need not press to La Rocca for a meal. But we crave to know whether our brother of Taverna has your grace's permission to wed the noble countess?"

“No, he has not,” replied the king angrily. “I must be better assured,” he continued, with anger increased by hearing the cries of “Long life to the Baron of Taverna!” which the crowd in the square below just then upsent: “I must be better assured of his own designs, and must be repaid the debts owed by himself, before I consent to increase his power and to continue his breed.”

“My lords, I think we may withdraw,” said our hero turning to his compeers with forced calmness.

“Soothe their anger, my lord: appease them;” urged the Elect of Syracuse in an undertone to the king.

“Let them do their worst, William,” whispered the queen. “Better have open foes than concealed ones.”

“May the saints have you in their keeping, gentlemen,” said the king haughtily. “I am going to dinner.”

“The pig!” exclaimed the Count of Lesina. “Let us leave him to gorge!”

They all turned on their heels and followed the Baron of Taverna, who, with the king’s bastard brother of Policastro, was already leaving the apartment. A sharp and insulting laugh from queen Margaret was heard by them all as, with brows contracted and fierce passions boiling within them, they strode along the gallery.

“I fear me your grace has acted very imprudently,” said the Bishop of Syracuse, as the nobles withdrew.

“To the foul fiend with them all!” said the king. “Money must be found to repair the damages of the earthquake. Let them rebel, if they like. Confiscation will follow. Come to dinner.”

He strode out of the room; and seeing in the passage the great stone mortar, by

rolling which against the door, the children had first disturbed him, he seized it with his two hands and cast it to the end of the gallery, whence it spun down the great stairs beyond with a noise and clatter that seemed to shake every wall in the palace.

“That does one good!” he cried. “It is all out now: and I shall dine and sleep in peace.”

“Long live the Baron of Taverna!” “Long life to our gallant deliverer!” cried the multitude on the Cassaro, as the cavalcade of barons again issued from the Alcazar. They thronged around and greeted the whole party with an enthusiastic devotion that seemed scarce less than it had been the day after he had done the deed they prized.

“Aye, friends,” exclaimed the Baron Ruggiero of Sanseverino reining in his steed and addressing the people; “I say

also long life to Matteo Bonello: but it depends upon you to see that his life be not shortened."

Repeated cheers for Taverna and groans for his enemies, whomsoever they might be, answered this appeal. The Norman waved his hand and regained his place in the cavalcade.

CHAPTER VIII.

"But if the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make; when all those legs and arms and heads chopped off in a battle shall join together at the latter day and cry all We died at such a place."

King Henry V.

LITTLE talk passed between the Baron of Taverna and his noble friends, as they rode back to his castle of Cacabo, after being so rudely repulsed by the king. More and more reserved became the bearing of each knight; more and more severe became each furrowed brow. Every one felt within himself that the crisis was at hand; and that the king's suspicious tyranny would compel them to look only to themselves for protection for their lives, their families, and property. Many a fist was more tightly

clenched: many a stave of some French or Provençal roundelay was thoughtlessly whistled, and as thoughtlessly allowed to die away on the compressed lips of the stern minstrel, whose mind was far from the tale of love its notes would have recorded. Many a heel unnecessarily smote the good war-horse that upbore it, and called forth an irregular bound and curvet, in accordance with the rider's fitful resolves; and many a noble steed was allowed to stumble over the stony road, while its master's thoughts were too busily engaged to heed the pathway beneath him, or anything except his own deep divings into the future.

They dismounted in the court of the castle, and all assembled together in the great hall in the keep. The chestnut table clattered with the sounds of heavy weapons that were unbuckled and laid upon it,

while many a knight rubbed his untanned brow, as he cast his iron scull-cap beside his sword. Our hero placed himself at the head of the table.

“Joy to you, friends,” he exclaimed: “Joy to you who can thus lay aside the trappings of war! They and I can part no more. You have all seen enough to be convinced upon what tenure I hold my life; but hold it I will so long as this hand can wield a lance. No tame submission on my part shall smooth the tyrant’s path to the overthrow of all our privileges.”

With the enthusiasm of a young man, Ruggiero dell’ Aquila, Count of Avellino, who had sympathized with our hero’s secret affections at the meeting at Bari, moved from the throng, and placing himself beside the baron, laid his hand affectionately upon his shoulder.

“Thou art not alone, Matteo,” he said.

“Dost think,” he whispered, “that no one but thyself can have an affair of the heart? Brother Normans,” he continued aloud, “I remember me of a certain pledge that was given by us at Bari.”

“And nobly has the Sieur of Taverna fulfilled the conditions on which it was given.” exclaimed the Conte Sanseverino. “My lords, we pledged ourselves that, if he would join our ranks against the upstart Majone, we would see him wed to the Countess of Catanzaro. He has done more than join us. With his own hand, he has delivered the country from the traitor.”

“What availed it!” cried the Count of Lesina fiercely. “William is himself worse than the Admiral. His own death can alone right the commonwealth.”

“I fear me it is even so,” continued Sanseverino. “We have all seen enough this day to convince us that the spirit of

Majone survives in the king and in the palace. I begin to doubt even if he did not himself prompt the iniquities which we charged upon the Admiral."

"I care nothing for the policy of the matter," interrupted the impetuous Count of Aquila. "Here stands my brother knight, to whom I gave a positive pledge: and here is my right hand with which to redeem it."

"Hist, brave Ruggiero," resumed Sanseverino. "We know that the bright eyes of a certain lady make thee to feel the baron's cause as thine own. I do not forget our pledge: I would not urge upon these gallant lords to slight its obligations. I would only point out to them that the same motives which banded us against Majone must band us now against the king. He is now the common enemy. He is, we all see, guided by the principles that

guided the Admiral: he has surrounded himself with all the familiars of the other: it is plain to be seen that he will adhere to the conduct for which we removed the other."

"His demand of that old debt from the *Sieur* of Taverna at this time, whether just or not, showed the same avaricious spirit," observed Simon of Policastro.

"And his refusal to sanction the marriage," said the Count of Lesina, "sprang, I have no doubt, from the old wish to secure the reversion of the fiefs. Let those who have daughters to marry,—which, thank heaven! I have not,—or who wish to marry heiresses themselves, look to it!"

"There is no help for it, gentlemen," resumed Sanseverino. "I merely wished to prove to you that you had no choice if you regarded your own safety, your own honour. Honour, do I say? Why I should

almost fear to misuse the word when I see the sons of those brave Normans who conquered Sicily and gave its crown to this man's grandfather, cowering in the hall of a mountain fortress, after they have been publicly insulted by him who is king only by their suffrages! Would our fathers have borne it? Ask yourselves whether they would have acted as tamely as we have this day behaved, and you will resolve with me not to be degenerate!"

"They would have plunged their swords into his heart where he stood!" exclaimed Lesina. "And would," he added, "would to heaven that I myself had done so!"

A murmur of applause greeted this speech, uttered with all the intensity of savage feeling, for which the Count of Lesina was so noted.

"Away then with irresolution!" cried Ruggiero dell' Aquila. "Let us show

whose sons we are. Death, say I, to the tyrant! Let us show him who are the true lords of Italy. Your hand, friend; and yours, and yours!" he cried to each one around the table, as each linked his iron hand in that of his neighbour. "Here we stand a chain of Norman knights, who pledge ourselves that we will never wear the slavish thrall of our own king. Long life to Taverna, and death to all who would deny our pledge!"

"Long life to the noble Baron!"

"Evviva the Countess of Catanzaro!"

"Our pledge!" "Our pledge!" tumultuously cried the assembled knights.

"Ho, steward," cried Ruggiero dell' Aquila, "send round the great wassail cup, and let us pledge ourselves in good liquor, to be true men to our host."

"In faith," said Simon of Policastro, "my brother's cheer this morning was not

such as to take away our appetite. He himself holds that exchange is no robbery : witness his having given me the little county of Policastro in place of my father's noble principality of Tarento. He objects not to exchanges. So with your leave, my lord of Taverna, we will do better credit to your good cheer than we could have done to the viands he so churlishly refused us."

"And let him thank himself for the toasts we shall give," cried him of Lesina.

"Roger dell' Aquila," said the Count Sanseverino to the youth who stood opposite to him at the other side of the table, as the sewer approached, bending under the weight of an enormous goblet,—“Roger dell' Aquila, hold my poignard. I, for one, like to keep up the customs of our northern forefathers. We are all here friends and brothers ; and only as a symbol, do I bid

thee to keep guard over me while I drink. But let the toast I am about to give proclaim no symbolic meaning, but be a pledge to be acted upon: As we hold one another's poignards, so swear we to stand by one another until we have redeemed our former pledge to the Baron of Taverna. Such is my toast, who will refuse it?"

He seized the golden tankard in his hands, and took a long draft of its spiced contents.

"Give! give!" cried Roger dell' Aquila, leaning over the table for the tankard, and casting his own poignard to Simon of Policastro to hold; "Give the goblet, friend; and let me swear the noble oath. Mathew Bonello and the Countess of Catanzaro for ever!"

"And death to the tyrant!" cried the savage Lord of Lesina, striking the hilt of his dagger upon the board with a force

that would have jarred any arm but his own.

“ Friends, brothers, I thank ye,” said our hero as the mighty goblet went round the assembly, and was stooped more and more at every draft. “ My cause is, indeed, the cause of you all. Why, by all the saints in heaven, the man seems to take us for Greeks, that he dares to assume such a bearing towards us ! So, I have heard, do the Emperors treat their subjects : but not thus would even the Great Count in his proudest days have dared to insult his Norman brethren in arms. And shall this king, whose only eminence is derived from an eminent grandfather, be allowed to do what that grandfather himself would never have attempted ? Forbid it honour ! Forbid it manhood ! Think what the Normans are doing all over the world ; and let not us sit down in Sicily and

submit tamely to the second-hand dictation of Greeks and eunuchs. I thank ye for that cheer," he continued as, warmed by the liquor, they responded to his appeal: "I thank ye for that cheer. With the support of such friends, our cause must prosper. It must and it shall! But now, as we are all fasting since the morning, let me bid you into the other hall, where I doubt not we shall be able to satisfy our hunger without the permission of him who encumbers the Norman throne of Sicily. Follow, friends, I pray ye."

Amid many congratulations and friendly pledges, he led the way to the hall on the next floor, where an immense table groaned under the weight of varied viands and choice vases of gold and silver—the Norman spoils of former Saracenic civilization. The repast was prolonged; though not immoderately so: what to a Greek or

an Italian had seemed much was drank ; yet not enough to impair the faculties of northern warriors, or to lessen their keen perception of the chances and dangers of their position. That position was long and coolly discussed : no one there was so false as to wish to retract the pledge he had given : no one there was so mean-spirited as to wish to submit to the over-bearing tyranny of one whose dynasty had hardly yet lasted long enough for him to be considered in any other light than as an equal, exalted by themselves for their own good. It was unanimously resolved to work out the conspiracy which had been so suddenly hatched. In those days, it needed not much to originate a plot for the dethronement of a sovereign. No scruples of conscience opposed the decision of the Norman Counts. Their only anxiety was so to organize their plans as to secure the co-

operation of their fellow nobles and the assent of the people.

“But,” said Simon of Policastro, “I can be no party to the death of William. Robber and extortionate as he has been to me, he is my father’s son, whatever the laws of holy Church may say against the connexion; and I can be no party to his death nor to the dethronement of his family.”

“Nor would I, my lords, wish to accomplish either,” replied our hero. “We cannot do better, I apprehend, than resume the plot of the late Admiral—seeking only, in good faith, and in reality, that which he treacherously professed to have in view. We know that his real purpose was to seize the crown for himself: his avowed object was to confine King William and to place that crown upon the brows of his son Ruggiero. Such, I advise, be our present plan.”

“Better far to kill William out of the way at once!” exclaimed the Count of Lesina.

“No! no! no!” cried Policastro and Taverna and Sanseverino.

“The people would hardly go along with us. They have a superstitious reverence for an anointed sovereign,” expostulated Ruggiero of Sanseverino.

“And,” added the Count of Policastro, “they would never consent to take the government from his race. The boy, Ruggiero, is considered to be a promising lad.”

“Ruggiero for ever! Let it be Ruggiero!” exclaimed several voices at once: and so the scheme was definitely settled with the approbation of all present.

The meeting was, however, prolonged. Not on that day did the conspirators separate. Late into the night, they sat, debating and forming plans for their future

conduct. What barons would readily join them, who would need to be approached with caution, who should be won by promises and who by threats, what steps should be adopted to arouse the animosity of the people against the king, what to overreach the vigilance of the eunuchs—all these questions did they discuss with the quickness and aptitude of men well used to undertakings of danger, to the chances and expedients of civil war. Prudence succeeded to the first rashness generated by the insult they had received at the Alcazar. It was resolved to do nothing hastily: but that each one should assiduously labour to draw partizans to the cause, to ingratiate himself with the people, to levy and arm followers, and to fortify and provision his own castle in readiness for the time of trial whenever it should be deemed prudent to raise the standard of rebellion.

“If the keeper of the prisoners under the Rocca could be won over, our cause were secure!” exclaimed young Ruggiero dell’ Aquila suddenly. “Does any one know anything of him?” he asked.

“An ill-looking dog as need be,” replied Simon of Policastro. “I, you know, have had the advantage of being under his safe keeping; but I could make nothing of him!”

“I saved the fellow’s life once,” observed our hero.

“At him, then; at him forthwith!” replied the impetuous youth. “And now, with thy good leave, Matteo, I will hie me elsewhere. *Vive la joie!* a man must not give up his whole time to treason. I leave it to fructify with the gentle Conte di Lesina here. Too much of it would be inexcusable in one connected, as I am, with our benedetto King William the

Great. By the bye, friends, that title, which he acquired in former times, ought to be changed ; and I propose that, instead of ‘Guglielmo il Magno’, we christen him ‘Guglielmo il *male*---William the Bad’. The name will take, depend upon it ! I will hie me and ask my aunt, Adelesia, what she thinks of it. William the Bad for ever !” he shouted, laughing as he left the room, after kindly embracing our hero, and, still more affectionately, the Count of Sanseverino.

Two hours later, his foaming horses stood in the court-yard of a castle almost on the outskirts of Palermo. He himself was sitting on a couch of coarse worsted embroidery, between a pale attenuated elderly gentlewoman, and one of the sweetest faces the bright sun of Sicily ever shone upon. The owner of it could scarcely be fifteen years of age, and the innocent trust-

fulness of expression that beamed through her full brown eyes and sat upon her laughing lips, made her appear younger still.

“ Be prudent ; for heaven’s sake be prudent,” the old lady was saying in a tone of earnest expostulation. “ Vex me not, Ruggiero : thou art the last, the only hope of an honoured race. Oh give not my cousin, William, cause to be offended with thee.”

“ If King William the Bad—how dost thou approve the name, Aunt Adelesia ?” replied the youth,—“ if King William the Bad chooses to be offended because I declare that dear Agatha here is the sweetest saint out of heaven, let him, say I. His anger cannot make me blind nor senseless,” continued the young man, suddenly seizing the hand of the fair girl and bearing it to his lips.

“Santa Maria ! Santa Maria !” exclaimed the old lady, wringing her hands and stamping with her foot, “How canst thou be so mad. Thou knowest he will never consent.”

“Hark ye, aunt,” answered Ruggiero, rising and taking a hand of each ; “Hark ye :” and he whispered softly, “We will make him consent. Addio,” he continued, “I only just called in to see if you were alive after the earthquake. Agatha, bella ; your brother, Ruggiero Sanseverino, will call for you to-morrow and take you home. And I advise you, aunt, to come and charm your solitary hours at my castle of Aquila. Addio, addio, for the present.”

With an affectionate and cheerful look, he hastened from them.

CHAPTER IX.

“His brow was sad ; his eye beneath
Flash'd like a faulchion from its sheath,
And, like a silver clarion, rung
The accents of that unknown tongue,
Excelsior ! Longfellow.

A FORTNIGHT had passed away. In a small room underneath the palace of the Rocca, and to which a flight of narrow steps led from a bye-lane, sate the jailor, Gavaretto. He was busily engaged in burnishing up his armour ; and was muttering smothered curses to himself against his present office, which debarred him from keeping it bright by use.

"But for the honour of the thing, one might as well be obliged to stay on the other side of that door as on this," he said.

“ A jailor is only a prisoner who may not try to escape.”

“ But think of the honour, good Gavaretto ; and think of the opportunity a jailor has of serving his friends,” replied Richard MacMardagh, entering the room, and speaking before the other had had time to observe him.

“ Pray who are you ?” asked Gavaretto surlily, as he laid down his hauberk and quietly took up the great sword that lay on the table.

“ Why, Gavaretto, thou hast a bad memory : dost thou not remember me ?”

“ If I did, I should not ask you who you are. Who are you, I say again ?”

“ And thou wilt try and make that great unwieldy weapon and my head better acquainted unless I tell thee ; is it not so, sweet Gavaretto ?” asked the Irishman gaily.

“Speak, boy,” said the jailor pettishly. “I have seen thy baby face before, or I had already cut short thy foolish prattle.”

“Put back thy sword, then ; and resume the old rusty hauberk thou wast rubbing so affectionately,” insisted MacMardagh. “Put down thy lumbering sword, which I could break into shivers with a blow of this little steel shillelah, or machue as your Normans call it.”

“Talk away, lad, as much as you list,” replied the jailor. “I have not time to waste upon you ;” but as he spoke, he did, in fact, replace the sword and resume the piece of harness he had been polishing.

“Oh, thou rememberest the shillelah, dost thou !” observed the squire triumphantly. “I thought I should make thee recollect me. I thought Gavaretto could not have such a very short memory,” he added significantly.

“ Say on,” observed the jailor surlily.

“ Say on, quotha,” replied MacMardagh ;
“ what should I say ?”

“ That which thou hast come here to tell,” replied Gavaretto. “ I am a man of few words, master squire ; and I like not to fence in the dark. You have not sought me out for nothing ; so let us hear what it is.”

“ Thou rememberest me, then ?” asked the squire.

The jailor nodded a sulky assent.

“ Thou rememberest that I was beside my lord, when he saved thy throat from Abderachman’s scimitar ?”

The same token of assent was vouchsafed.

“ Thou rememberest that, as we were riding back to Palermo, thou didst go up and tender thy thanks to his signoria ?”

Gavaretto again nodded, but without looking up.

“Thou rememberest that thou didst promise to repay the service if time and chance should give thee an occasion of doing so?”

“Is he arrested?” asked Gavaretto with a look of interest. “Are they bringing him into my charge?”

“Not yet: but his life is aimed at: and that by the lies and machinations of this same Abderachman. Hast thou not heard of the king’s ill-will?”

“What can I do? I cannot serve him while he is at large,” said the jailor.

“Is this tyranny never to end? Is all the best blood in Italy to be placed under thy charge?” asked the Irishman.

“Who cares? They are Normans,” muttered Gavaretto.

The Irishman looked intently into his

surly face: then, with almost intuitive perception of his meaning, he darted forwards and seized him eagerly by the arm.

“Art thou, too, a patriot?” he cried. “Say, say; can an Italian love his country?”

“Young man,” said Gavaretto slowly, “my only joy in life is in executing the commands of the king—and,” he added, while a flash lit up, for a moment, his dark eyes, “and in seeing these Norman oppressors thus avenge, upon each other, the wrongs of my country.”

“Oh, Saint Patrick be praised! I did not know that such a feeling had place in Italy!” exclaimed MacMardagh.

“Aye, every wandering pilgrim and fortune-hunter has his word to cast against Italy!” replied the jailor bitterly. “And we deserve it: we deserve it. If these Normans could break the power of our

infidel oppressors, we surely might have overcome them ourselves. However, that chance is passed. But believe me, young man, that every Italian burns to wage war with every successive swarm of tyrants who may ravage and enslave his country."

"Wilt thou, then, join us? Wilt thou give thine aid to rescue the lord of Taverna from the king's anger and Abderachman's wiles?" asked Richard MacMardagh eagerly.

"I have shown that I will by speaking as I have done," said the jailor. "I knew your errand, young sir. I knew that you would not seek Gavaretto unless you had something to ask: and I had heard rumours which made me guess what that something was."

"And you are with us?" asked MacMardagh.

"Young man, you have my secret," answered the jailor. "I will do anything

to avenge the wrongs of Italy: and if I can, at the same time, repay my obligation to your lord and help the Normans to cut each other's throats, I shall be as well pleased as when I rivet the fetters upon some prince of Capua or other count who has made himself great on the ruins of my country."

"Would that thou wert an Irishman!" exclaimed MacMardagh enthusiastically.

"I thank your signoria: but were I to change my country, I would not go from slavery to slavery. I have had my turn of the one in Italy: when I forswear it, I will take my place amongst the tyrants of other lands, not amongst the oppressed."

"And I," said MacMardagh, with his eyes flashing indignantly, "I would rather cast my lot with the wronged and the oppressed, whom my own arm might help to freedom, than be the proudest tyrant ever accurst of man and heaven!"

“ Each one to his taste,” said Gavaretto superciliously. “ The war against tyranny is too long for a man to take service in it to please a passing fancy, as if it were a crusade to the Holy Sepulchre. Italy has had some centuries of such a struggle : and, may be, your own country, which, I take it, is somewhere beyond the seas, may have to endure it for more years than you, young as you are, will number. No, no ; give me either the sweets of revenge upon my oppressors, or the pleasure of being an oppressor myself.”

“ And thou hast no love of freedom for its own sake ?” asked the Irishman.

“ No : but I have for the sake of Italy ; and I will give it a helping hand in my time. And now, young sir, let me know what you want whenever the time comes ; and do not plague me beforehand. Comings and goings only beget suspicion. Now

give me your oath that you will not betray my secret."

"Willingly, good Gavaretto. I swear by all the saints—"

"Swear by the love you bear your own country instead," said the jailor interrupting him. "It is a fancy of mine: but I think that oath will be the most binding on you."

While his eyes swam with his emotion, Richard MacMardagh caught the Italian's hand. "By the love and truth I bear to my dear, lost fatherland, I swear to thee!" he said.

Both were silent for a few minutes.

"Thou must let me into the prisons, Gavaretto," observed the Irishman at length.

"Wherefore?"

"Thou hadst better not be told. It is easy for thee to guess. Suffice it that I

have a message to deliver from the Count Simon of Policastro to the Lord Robert of Basseville."

"Come this way," said the jailor.

He led him along one or two winding and darkened passages, in which sentinels on guard kept constant watch, to a gallery, one end of which opened upon the outer air. A sign urged him to go forwards; and, without saying a word, he himself retired back towards his own cell.

There was a large courtyard adjoining the back, that is the southern side, of the royal palace of the Rocca. It was sunk about eight feet below the level of the natural soil; but walls rose from its own basement to the height of ten feet above the earth around. Massive and thick, no window or loop-hole diversified this beetling wall, which was again surmounted by an iron fencing of pointed spikes. It sur-

rounded the square on three sides. The fourth side was formed by the palace itself, underneath which were rooms and cells of various sizes. These were on a level with the paving of the court, into which many of them opened. Other courts of a similar description adjoined the palace at Palermo. We need not now pass beyond this one.

It was the beginning of the month of December ; and to the favoured children of the south, the air seemed to blow chill and keen. Groups of men moved briskly up and down the courtyard, or stood or reclined against its sunny wall. In the midst of one of the latter of these, a venerable figure lay upon a stone bench. It was the Prince of Capua, whose arrest, on suspicion of intended treason against the sovereign, we recorded in the first chapter of our chronicle. Nothing had ever been proved against him, or had been attempted to be

proved. There he lay ; the victim of despotic power in a barbarous age :—and when was despotic power ever tolerated but in an age of barbarism ? His features must have been formerly noble ; his figure must have been formerly erect. But now a bright red scar disfigured all his face—sad evidence of the torture of the heated iron basins, by which his eye-sight had been burned out ; and two crutches lay beside the stone bench to support his noble figure, since the sinews, at the back of his insteps, had been cut in twain by the order of the tyrant.

Several other prisoners stood around him :—Robert of Basseville, maternal cousin of the king, and Eberard, Count of Squillace,—both of whom, as we have shewn, had been arrested by Majone, in order to remove them from the king, to whom they were personally attached, when

he first matured his scheme of treachery:—Tancred, Count of Lecce, a son of the king's elder brother, born out of wedlock, and who, with his brother William, had been held a prisoner in the palace, although neither of the unfortunate princes had shewn the least disposition to dispute the laws of church and state which excluded them from power. A man of a noble presence, and in the prime of life, Tancred had now lived in the prisons, without openly repining, ever since, by the death of his father and grandfather, Roger, the first king of Sicily, William the Bad had succeeded to undivided sovereignty. A frank and yet thoughtful manner, free from pride or affectation of any sort, gave no reason to suppose that he was either playing the part of a contented prisoner, or that he nourished an ambitious spirit to carve out for himself that future which

the misfortunes of Sicily and of all Italy eventually forced upon him.

Other captives stood around, or sauntered about the courtyard. It is unnecessary that we should mention them individually. Indeed, the whole number being little short of a hundred (and there were many more in other wards), it would be impossible for us to do so. Most of them had been snatched from the first families of the kingdom, and were imprisoned, either from the mere jealous fears of the sovereign, or in punishment for some of the many rebellions which his tyranny had occasioned.

“And I take it,” said Roberto of Basseville, continuing the conversation around the crippled Prince of Capua; “I take it that our numbers will, ere long, be increased. There must be some foundation for the rumour that all of us have heard

none of us know where—the rumour of a new conspiracy against the tyranny of William. He will get the better of his enemies as he always does, and we shall have so many the more companions.”

“Fortune of war, gentlemen,” replied the Prince of Capua in a cheerful tone of voice. “Here am I, descended from one of the noblest of our Norman stocks, and lord of the first principality in the kingdom: here I am, a maimed cripple by the order of William. Yet I do not complain of him. Had we been in his place, we should probably have done the same by our enemies. Fortune of war, I say.”

“You are what the learned Greeks call a philosopher, prince,” replied the Count of Squillace. “For my part, I care not to conceal my feelings at having been shut up here without any cause whatever. No one was more devoted to the king than I was.

Thus am I requited! Be it so. These rumours must have some foundation in fact: and I only pray that others may not succeed against the tyrant, until I have had an opportunity of showing the sort of love I now bear him."

Richard MacMardagh was now seen modestly approaching the group.

"Who art thou, good youth?" inquired Tancred. "If a prisoner, thy state hardly entitles thee to herd with us: if not a prisoner, who art thou? Thy dress is somewhat strange."

And strange indeed, even in that sad place, looked the tight-fitting dress of black woollen, the sling and the bolts and the iron machue which, as we have before said, the spirit of nationality ever made the adventurer retain.

"My lords, I am an Irishman," he answered, with some remains of the excited

feelings of patriotism which his recent talk with Gavaretto had called up.

“An Irishman!” exclaimed the blinded Prince of Capua. “What sort of a man may he be, messires? Ireland—Ireland—what have I heard of Ireland of late. Has not the King of England conquered it?”

“No, monseigneur, and never will, though pope and emperor back him!” replied MacMardagh angrily.

“Hola! hola! Young blood apparently,” replied the prince amused. “King Henry is a brave Norman.”

“But Irishmen are not Italians,” retorted Richard.

“But the pope says they are heathens and ignorant savages,” observed Prince Tancred. “Surely the holy father was mistaken; for I have known many an Irish priest in my days, who spoke of the country as being a very island of saints.”

“And, my lords, permit me to remind you,” said the squire, “that your famed Universities of Paris and of Pavia were both founded by Irishmen.”

“I know nought of the universities,” said Robert of Basseville ; and then added, with the self-sufficiency of a knight of those days, “Perhaps their learning may make the Irish none the better able to defend their country. Who is now their king ?”

“Murertach Macloughlin,” replied Mac Mardagh proudly.

“Maria Santissima ! what a name !” exclaimed the Prince of Capua. “Who can marvel that they should be deemed heathens, if they do not call themselves by the names of Christians ?”

“Perhaps they call themselves after Irish saints of their own,” observed Tancred.

“Perhaps they do,” replied the old

prince. "But I have had a good deal of experience; and, believe me, that those islanders would be better thought of by the rest of the world, if they would call themselves by such names as we ourselves use. No one could believe even the pope, if he were to call a King Henry, or William, or Richard, or Roger, a barbarian! Depend upon it, there is very much in a name. I advise, therefore, that we now ask the name of our young visitor, and what business brings him to us."

"May I crave to know if either of these lords is the Lord of Basseville?" asked the squire.

"I am he," answered the count, stepping forward.

"Your signoria will, therefore, recognize these tokens from my own Lord of Taverna and from the Conte Simon of Policastro," continued the Irishman, handing him a couple of rings.

“All right, by heaven!” ejaculated de Basseville, as he examined them. “Who art thou, my man? Speak out and say thine errand. None are here but friends.”

“I follow the Baron of Taverna as his squire,” replied the youth. “He and the Count of Policastro bade me tell your lordship, that the state has gained nothing by the death of Majone; that the king is still ruled by the same maxims, and is surrounded by all the creatures of the admiral. That he refuses to allow my lord to contract the union to secure which all the counts pledged themselves at Bari; that he exacts old debts, and has grievously repelled and insulted the Counts of Policastro and Sanseverino and the others who waited on him.”

“This looks promising!” cried de Basseville, turning to Prince Tancred. “Go on, friend,” he continued to the Irishman.

Richard MacMardagh resumed; and detailed the resolutions to which so many powerful barons had pledged themselves. He told how many were already preparing to take the field; explained the object of the conspiracy; and besought the noble prisoners to use their influence among the other captives, to organize them and hold them in readiness to bear assistance whenever it might be resolved to strike the blow.

We need scarcely say, that the proposals were eagerly heard and cheerfully acceded to on the part of all present.

“Success can avail me little,” said the mutilated Prince of Capua: “but I lack revenge, and my heart is with you.”

The envoy was made acquainted with several other of the principal prisoners who were sunning themselves in the courtyard during the short hour allotted to exercise.

By all he was gratefully and graciously received. The palace clock struck the hour; and the jailors appeared, to reconduct the captives to the narrow and wretched cells allotted to most of them. With kind words and looks, the three we have particularly noticed dismissed the Irishman; and even made some passing compliments, through him, to his country. They had already found out, that to render justice to Ireland was the easiest way to secure the confidence and willing cooperation of her patriotic son.

CHAPTER X.

“ Quick ! we have but a second,
Fill round the cup while you may,
For Time, the churl, hath beckon'd,
And we must away, away !
Grasp the pleasure that 's flying,
For oh, not Orpheus' strain
Could keep sweet hours from dying,
Or charm them to life again.”

Moore.

A FEW weeks wore away. The conspiracy gained ground. Dissatisfaction increased amongst the people. Made aware of the persecutions to which their favourite, the Lord of Taverna, was exposed by the jealousy and rapacity of the king, their enthusiasm for him rose to the highest pitch, and the indignation of William was more and more excited by contrasting it with the ill-will which, since the death of

Majone, had centered upon himself. Entirely secluded in the Alcazar, and addicted to slothful repose, he took no part in the management of public affairs further than to drink in greedily every report that was invented or repeated to him by the cunuchs of the palace to the disadvantage of Taverna or of his friends, and to wreak the suggestions of their malice so far as his dread of popular anger enabled him to do so. The Bishop Elect of Syracuse was almost powerless in his endeavours to promote justice and good government: Queen Margaret, the Gaieto Pietro, and their Saracen creatures, overruled all his counsels; and seemed more and more resolved to work out their own revenge upon the slayer of Majone, at whatever risk to the peace and obedience of the people.

Those who had taken part with Matteo of Taverna, those who had supported him

in his application to wed the Countess Clemence, were, of course, marked men; and every species of persecution was directed against them that their enemies dared to indulge. Strong bodies of retainers and the favour of the people alone protected them when they rode abroad; and they had quietly put their castles into such a state of defence, that few of them could have been mastered without a regular siege. No open act or treasonous design could yet be proved against them; but, confiding in the former good fortune which had ever attended the king in war, Queen Margaret was nothing loth to urge them on by persecution to adopt such measures of self-defence as might seem to justify all her secret accusations against them.

Meanwhile, although the conspiracy was rapidly spreading, it advanced not in pro-

portion to the eagerness of the two lovers, who were more immediately interested in its success. The Baron of Taverna was now a frequent visitor at the castle of Mistretto; and the Countess Clemence no longer disguised the affection which she had ever felt for him. As betrothed lovers, they both eagerly awaited that permission from the sovereign which, in those days, was a necessary preliminary to the union of every great feudatory of the Sicilian crown. Roger dell' Aquila was still more impatient to secure the hand of his beloved Agatha. Connected, as he was, through his aunt Adelesia, with the king himself, he well knew that William would never consent to his union with the sister of that Count of Sanseverino whom all looked upon as the stoutest friend of Matteo of Taverna. He had, therefore, never applied for a permission that would be indignantly

refused. His only hope was in the organization and success of the conspiracy, which advanced far too slowly for his ardour.

“Matteo,” he exclaimed at length to our hero; “is this never to end? All the best days of our youth are slipping away while we are plotting and marshalling followers and adherents with the coolness of grey-beards. I vow to thee that I will wait no longer. It will take us years to overcome the dastard scruples of the few Counts that still hold out. Let us wed the ladies of our hearts at once.”

“Would that it were possible,” sighed Taverna.

“Possible? every thing is possible to a gallant knight!” retorted the youth.

“Thou art right!” exclaimed the baron eagerly, “I will ride over to Mistretto and beseech the Countess to consent. To tell thee the truth, I myself have feared lest

something should occur to cool the ardour of our friends, and to make them forget their pledge. Let us wed at once; and bring the question to an issue. They will then be compelled to raise the standard."

"They will do so gladly: they cannot hesitate as men of honour," replied dell' Aquila. "Is it not so?" he asked, addressing Ruggiero of Sanseverino who then joined them, and repeating what they had just said. "I am sure thy gallantry, Ruggiero," he continued, "will approve the *coup de main*. Wilt thou give thy consent to my union with thy sweet sister?"

Sanseverino turned aside and took several turns on the glacis of the castle on which they were standing. He strode backwards and forwards, thoughtfully and in silence.

"I approve the scheme," he said at length. "She shall be thine, as soon as

the Countess of Catanzaro will consent to wed Matteo. We are strong enough to hoist the standard. Once unfurled, friends will flock around it."

"To horse! to horse!" exclaimed our hero; "come with me, both of you, to Mistretto. Thou, Sanseverino, must prove to Clemence that it is not only my own rashness that urges the step. Let us hasten at once to secure her consent."

It may well be believed that they were soon in their saddles. Followed by a little army of retainers, they cantered over the stony mountain passes that led to the castle of the good knight Tommaso.

He, at once and boisterously, ushered them into the presence of his niece.

With what would now be called a theatrical air, Ruggiero dell' Aquila immediately threw himself on his knee before her.

“Beautiful countess,” he exclaimed, “the salvation of the kingdom and all my happiness depends upon you. Oh, vouchsafe to consign the one to civil war and the other to wedlock !”

“Are you quite sure, monseigneur, that, in your case, the latter would not lead to the former ?” she gaily asked.

“Impossible !” he replied, “impossible ! I swear it by the hatred we all bear to the king, and by our love for our honoured mistresses.”

“Such pledges ought, indeed, to reassure me,” said the countess. “How then, signor Conte, can I promote your happiness ?”

“By becoming mine, dearest Clemence,” interposed the Baron of Taverna. “It is useless to wait for the king’s consent or for the result of our undertaking. Let us be happy while we may. Our immediate union would most promote the success of

the good cause. We have all so considered. Oh, consent to the prayer."

"I shall do no such thing," cried the countess with mock anger. "What! are all the counts of Sicily first to agree to barter away my hand in exchange for the life of an old traitor, and then to order me to marry their champion at a moment's warning? I will do no such thing. I will choose my husband myself, and will not marry him till I please."

"Dear, dearest lady, do be serious," expostulated Taverna.

"Do not you think I am so?" she asked pouting. "You have been so much engaged with warlike preparation of late, that you cannot think a woman's anger serious unless it blazes and consumes like the Greek fire. I am very angry, very angry indeed. Remember that same fire will burn under water,—too deep to be seen."

“But not under the holy water with which the priest shall bless us,” answered Taverna fondly. “Hear me, dearest Clemence. I wish I could copy your own sweet perverseness. If I could, I would say that you must and shall give me this little hand next Tuesday.”

“Next Tuesday indeed! You shall never have it at all, *Sieur of Taverna*. I marvel at your presumption!” she cried.

“Thanks be to San Gennaro, that matter is well settled!” cried old Tommaso. “I know her, *signor Barone*. Whenever she says, in that tone, that a thing shall never be, she has already consented to it. I give you joy,” and he folded the baron in his arms.

“Thanks, thanks, dear lady Clemence!” cried Roger dell’ Aquila. “You have made me the happiest man alive. We must get Agatha to consent to the same

day, and we will all be married together."

"Blessed times we shall have apparently under the new rule!" exclaimed the countess. "King William and his ministers will not permit ladies to marry at all: King Sanseverino and his knights will compel them to marry when and whom their lordships please."

"As you appeal to me, lady," said the Conte Sanseverino, "I admit that I do consider it very desirable that the matter should be brought to a crisis. And if you consent to our prayers, I will engage to prepare my sister, Agatha, to give her hand to dell' Aquila on the same day. Let not your good aunt, Adelesia, know aught of the matter," he continued, turning to Ruggiero. "It would do no good, and would draw King William's anger upon herself. I will bring Agatha here on Tues-

day morning, and Signor Tommaso will doubtless invite the clergy to be in readiness to perform their part."

We need not detail the conversation that followed. We have reported enough to show that our heroine would be no unwilling bride on the appointed day. Her tone of banter was but a mask, put on to conceal the depth of her own feelings. Those feelings were all in favour of the step which the king's wrath had now so long delayed. She knew that it would precipitate civil war: and that her husband's safety would be no longer compatible with that of the king. But civil war was not, in those days, a source of unusual anxiety; and the last few months had shewn that Taverna already held his life on no other tenure than that of his baronial power. His danger could not be increased, but his safety might be more easily secured by the union.

The few intervening days drew their length slowly away. By our hero, they were employed in warning his friends to prepare for the outburst that would surely follow his bold disregard of his sovereign's will. He collected all he could influence at the castle of Cacabo; and Richard Mac Mardagh was an indefatigable envoy to arouse the spirit of the more doubtful.

Tuesday at length came. A noble band of the first knighthood of the age rode over from the castle of Cacabo and crowded the little chapel of Mistretto. The Bishop of Salerno performed the sacred rites. Sanseverino gave away his blooming little sister to his noble-hearted and impetuous young friend; and the lusty knight Tommaso could not conceal his joy as he placed the trembling hand of the countess in the broad palm of the Baron of Taverna. She was pale and seemed anxious: but her

dark blue eyes looked forth, with a lustre that would not be dimmed, from her marble cheeks and her flaxen hair; and ever and anon she brushed the swelling tear from her black eye-lashes ere it could attract the notice of the warriors around. She seemed resolved that no show of weakness on her part should mar the determination which inspired them all, or cast the forebodings that weighed upon her own heart over those through whose energy she, and he whom she loved more than herself, could now alone hope for safety.

The holy ceremony and its accompanying festivities were over. The guests were all departed. Taverna and dell' Aquila accompanied them to the drawbridge and warmly thanked them for their countenance and promised support. Tommaso went with them.

“In a few days I will rejoin you at

Cacabo," said our hero; and he left them and returned towards his bride.

"Be it so," said Roger dell' Aquila; "but Chastelain," he added to the officer left in command of the garrison, "mark my injunction: whatever chances may occur, whatever news thou mayest hear, whatever appeals may be sent, listen not to them, report them not to us this week. Rough times are coming on. Let this week be given up to other cares. See that my order be implicitly attended to."

The officer promised obedience; and the impetuous youth flew back to his bride.

CHAPTER XI.

“Revenge and honour call: my soul distraught,
Sees what is nearest: vengeance can be bought
With honour. Then give vengeance! What to me,
Without revenge, were life? A mockery!
A mockery were honour. Only swear
Thou wilt avenge, and from my heart I tear
Remorse and honour, and so humble me
That I will try to love—love even thee.”

The Snow Storm.

It was the blessed Christmas time, in which our hero and heroine and their two friends had wed, in defiance of the prohibition of King William of Sicily: and cheerful and happy and religious was that holy season seven hundred years ago, as it is now, and will ever be, in countries where religion brings joy and balm to the heart; and where faith is so lively that it seems but the reproduction of memory

Cold and frost drove not the inhabitants of that favoured country to in-door hilarity and the warmth of blazing Yule logs : their cheerfulness was testified by their merry gatherings in the country beyond the walls of Palermo ; and their piety by the frequent visits which they paid to those churches where the event, which every heart so gratefully acknowledged, was reproduced in the most impressive manner.

It was the custom in those days, as it still is in Italy, for artists and pious people to unite with the clergy in “getting up” such representations of the history of the Nativity as were supposed to arouse and increase the devotion of the people. In more than one church in and around Palermo, portions of the sacred building were fitted up with such scenery and figures as might most aptly represent the blessed occurrence according to the judg-

ment of the designer : and, amongst all the churches, the little one of San Giovanni (de' leprosi), to which we have before had occasion to allude, had long been pre-eminent for the supposed skill and taste with which the birth of the Saviour had been ever represented within it. On the present occasion, report said that the designers of the exhibition had maintained their former character : and thousands flocked daily through the palm grove to visit the humble shrine.

The church was, indeed, as small as any of those which the Normans had, as yet, erected in the island. The large square stones of which it was built (they are still there) were unadorned by mosaics or ornaments. Tiny was the cupola that rose upon its four pointed arches, and led the eye on to three apses at the eastern end. One of these was partitioned off to be the

scene of the holy mystery. A screen in front shut out the glare of the sun ; and hidden lamps within the enclosure, threw a subdued light over the scene. There, before the eyes of the delighted beholder, uprose the hills on which the shepherds were feeding their flocks : figures, not very rudely designed and carved, represented them in size nearly as large as life ; their white sheep were on the hill side near them ; and many-coloured lamps, behind a silken screen, threw what was meant to be a blaze of glory upon the figure of the angel messenger of the glad tidings.

With delight, with admiration, and with fervour, the motley crowds of Christians stand and gaze on the scene. To them, the representation appears so perfect, that it images back the reality itself. Warm are their imaginations at all times : excited now by the joyful memories ever aroused

by this blessed festival, they easily carry their thoughts from the representation to the reality: and warm and pure and glad-some arise their silent aspirations to the God whose goodness that rude imagery so vividly recalls. Who would not wish to feel as they do when the heads of the sheep are moved by the strings beneath the stage, and when——But no:—

List to the tinkling bell that rings
High o'er that turf-clad mound;
It steals upon the spreading wings
Of the night air, and cheer'ly flings
Its fitful notes around.

O'er the short grass, the nibbling sheep
Stray loitering: but when
They scent some sweeter herbage near,
And run to crop it down, we hear
The silvery notes more loudly sweep
O'er mount and hollow glen.

Hard by their flocks, the shepherds lie,
And watch their track all drowsily;
They deem no prowling wolf will dare
Steal forth upon a night so fair:
They deem—but lo! what angel high
Stands by them, and what light—
Resplendent so it blinds their sight—

Outshines the moon, and fills the sky
With dazzling glare and brilliancy ?
They start upon their feet, and there
Stand fearing with a mighty fear :
And the scar'd sheep together run,
Then turn and face that heavenly one.*

Was it superstition to have all this brought home to the imagination by that rude exhibition ? Was it superstition to remember more vividly, while gazing on that show, all that it professed to represent : and remembering it all, to feel the heart swell with pious and gladsome and fervent thoughts, and to breathe forth those thoughts in many an earnest prayer and exclamation of thanksgiving ? Was it superstition to employ those sensible, those tangible objects to reproduce before the mind images which it might otherwise have cherished dimly and imperfectly, as the features sometimes appear to us of a

* The Christian Calendar.

beloved friend, of whom art has left us no portrait? If so, that crowd of Sicilians was, indeed, superstitious: for gazing, from the pasteboard mountains above, where the heavenly messenger was awakening the shepherds, to a lowly shed beneath, where the Blessed Mother and her Infant were shown in a ruinous stable—those simple Sicilian and Norman Christians felt their heart raised to the God of Grace; and fervent and humble and gladsome aspirations uprose from every breast, such as, we fear, might never have been evoked without this visible appeal to the senses.

Alas! that man is not wholly spiritual! The soul might then rise without any need first to obtain the consent of that body which now clogs its upward flight.

Hundreds entered and passed out from the sacred edifice. Within it, all was piety and recollection; without it, gaiety and

festivity showed the light-heartedness and the gratitude of the devotees. Booths were erected around: a sort of fair was carried on; and pleasure and piety mingling together, made each more attractive.

A group of three females seemed, however, to be more than usually regardless of the festivities without the church. They had together left the holy building, and had threaded their way through the surrounding multitude. Talking together placidly but anxiously, they were now on the point of emerging from the denser throng, when they were startled by a peal of loud laughter that came from a solitary drinking booth on the outskirts of the others. They quickened their pace: but a tall, gaunt figure, armed with a steel cap and a back and breast piece overlaid with iron rings, rushed from the door of the tent; and while it shook its fist me-

nacingly at those within, strode forwards and speedily joined them. It was Gavaretto, the jailor. Wearied, as we have seen, by the confinement imposed by his office, he had stolen from the prison, on this festive occasion, and had sought relaxation in what he knew to be the gayest scene then exhibited in Palermo. Religion had not brought him there, but a boon companion or two with whom he had sallied forth: and many a potation had been drunk in the wine-shop, when the sight of one of the three females passing the open doorway of the tent, had recalled to him so much of the duties and dangers of his trust as he had reason enough left to comprehend.

“How now, mistress Theresa!” he exclaimed, as he recognized the young girl in the more lowly costume she now wore, and addressed her in a tone somewhat less

lugubrious than that in which he usually spoke, though there now was a mysterious solemnity in his air which he had just borrowed from the wine-cup: "You are a wanderer, signora Theresa, like myself. Per ubbedirla, signorina," he continued, making an awkward and not very steady reverence to a young maiden who walked at the side of the other, as he recognized the faded form of the late Admiral's daughter, Corazza: "per ubbedirla: I knew you not before. Diavolo!" he muttered to himself, "what is to be done now? What side is she likely to favour? What have I heard about her? Corpo di Bacco, but she must be on our side: the barone and the Irish squire saved her life, and she is always with this Theresa, who is devoted to the countess!"

"How are you, good signor Gavaretto?" replied Theresa to his greeting. "Let me

counsel you to go into the church and visit the Holy Nativity. It is a beautiful sight."

"Beautiful! beautiful! I doubt not. Beautiful!" muttered Gavaretto. "But I have other matters to attend to, signorina Theresa; others matters to attend to. I think you love the countess, the beautiful countess, and the signor barone and the squire and all of them, mistress Theresa?" he asked. "My head is sorely confused since I have been imprisoned outside the gaol; but I think you wish them all well?"

"Doubtless I do, good Gavaretto," answered the young lady, interested by the mysterious looks and gestures with which he spoke. "I was the playmate and the attendant of the countess from her birth. She has no truer friend. What danger threatens her?"

“Every danger ; every danger. Come a little aside. I am not quite sure of that signorina Corazza,” he said, leading her a few paces in advance of the other two. “You must see them as soon as you go home, and tell them that this conspiracy must be pushed onwards ; or that it will get wind.”

“What conspiracy ?” exclaimed Theresa in surprise.

“Diavolo !” cried Gavaretto ; “do not play the hypocrite. Their own conspiracy, to be sure—the conspiracy to make the boy the king and to enable the baron to wed the countess.”

“Hush !” whispered Corazza to the other female, seizing her arm with a phrenzied grasp with one hand, and placing the other over her mouth.

A nod of intelligence replied ; and the two continued to advance on tiptoe close

behind Gavaretto and Theresa—leaning forwards so as to overhear most of what they said.

“You know all about it, mistress Theresa,” continued Gavaretto unaware of their nearness.

“Oh! the conspiracy to dethrone the king,” observed Theresa disguising her surprise, and aiming only to discover as much as possible of the plot. “And what must I do, good friend?”

“Tell your people that my wards are impatient; that they are eager to begin the work?”

“What: to be let loose into the palace?” interposed Theresa with quiet suggestiveness.

“Aye, aye,” said Gavaretto: “and that they talk about it amongst themselves; and I fear that some of my slaves might overhear them.”

“But are they all won over?” asked Theresa.

“Every Norman lord amongst them ; either out of hatred of the king or to fulfil their pledge.”

“What pledge?”

“Diamine ! why the pledge to see your people wed in spite of king or Saracen.”

Again Corazza grasped the hand of her attendant where they crept behind the two : she grasped it with such nervous violence, that she was unaware of the force she used ; and the poor woman could not repress a smothered cry of pain as she tore her wrist from the fingers of the little vixen. The exclamation was almost inaudible : but the suspicious and tried ears of Gavaretto overheard it ; and turning sharply round, he at once discovered the evesdroppers and his own imprudence. He drew his sword from its scabbard with an

oath. Corazza uttered a faint shriek : and several of those who were moving to or from the church now hastened towards them. A tall slim figure of a man-at-arms outstripped them all ; and the deep voice of Abderachman exclaimed from the disguise, “*Hola ! hola ! master Gavaretto ! wilt thou never be satisfied until I have cut that thick scraggy throat of thine ?*”

Gavaretto’s companions at the same time overtook him from the wine tent where he had left them ; and urged him to beware lest the king’s jailor should be discovered brawling so far from his charge. With reluctance he suffered himself to be led away ;—yielding the more readily to the influence of his friends, that Abderachman, anxious also to avoid discovery, drew aside Corazza and the women at the same time from the group that was now assembling,

and passed with them in another direction through the palm grove.

We must follow them.

They were about to leave the shelter of the trees, when Theresa stopped short, and, taking the hand of Corazza, besought her earnestly to go with her to Palermo.

“Recollect, dearest signorina, who you are,” she said. “Surely, surely the daughter of the Lord High Admiral should scorn to be the willing prisoner of a Saracen outlaw.

“What can I do?” murmured Corazza irresolutely. “I am not free to choose.”

“Only speak the word, dear child,” replied Theresa, “and my cries will soon summon honest men enough to protect you.”

With an ironical smile, Abderachman pointed to the dagger he wore in his belt.

“I care not for thy poignard!” cried the

faithful friend: "my life should be freely given to restore the Lady Corazza to her freedom and to her station in the world."

"That she might attend the bridal of the Baron of Taverna with the Countess of Catanzaro!" interposed Abderachman sarcastically. "Come, dear lady," he continued, "let us go and avenge ourselves first."

With an expression of fiendish and hardened resolution, she placed her hand in his and they turned aside together.

"Farewell, then, lady," said Theresa. "If such is your choice, my attendance upon you can be no longer needed. If you disregard your own character, I grieve for you: but I cannot appear to approve, by staying with you, that which I cannot prevent. May the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mother induce her Son to open

your eyes and bring you back in His own good time."

Corazza stood irresolute for a few moments, gazing on the calm sweet face of her faithful young friend.

"Come, come lady," whispered Abderachman. "The hour of vengeance is too nigh for this idle talk. You shall see the foolish girl again when it has passed away."

She cast her eyes on the ground; and without again daring to look into the face of Theresa, she followed Abderachman. They were both (with the Saracen duenna whom the robber had placed in charge over his victim) soon lost in the crowd of Christmas revellers.

Theresa wiped the tears from her eyes as she murmured a prayer for her truant charge. Then making the sign of the cross with a look of pious resignation, she

left the palm wood and re-entered the beaten track to the city, unaccompanied by the escort which had followed Corazza and the Saracen.

She had advanced but a little way upon it when she met Richard MacMardagh riding hastily towards the church of San Giovanni, followed by a couple of troopers. They were armed like himself. The Irishman reined in his steed as he perceived her, and leapt gallantly from his saddle. He threw the bridle to one of his followers and took his place at her side.

“Why all alone, and why this look of sadness, fair mistress Theresa?” he asked with seeming interest. “Sure I am that the memory of no sins has weighed upon you as you knelt before the blessed shrine. I too, was about to visit it; but I would rather breathe my vows to your own sweet self.”

“Speak not so lightly, I pray thee, Ricardo,” expostulated the young girl gravely. “I have too much to sadden me, to listen to talk which must ever seem worse than idle.”

With swimming eyes she told him how she had just separated from the Lady Corazza, and hinted her forebodings of evil to her wilful charge. She could not well have got away from Abderachman before this day, she told him; but her return to willing thralldom when she had the means of escape, filled her with anxiety: and made her feel that her own character required her to abandon the jealous child. “Then there is this conspiracy,” she continued; “this foul conspiracy which heaven seems to have revealed to me on purpose that I may defeat it; and, with heaven’s help, I will do so,” she averred.

“How mean you, signorina?” asked

MacMardagh anxiously. "Surely you would not interfere in such matters?"

"You, then, are in it!" she replied, "and the dear Countess of Catanzaro."

"Nay, of Taverna, an it please you, mistress," interposed the Irishman. "My noble lord wedded the lady yesterday."

"God prosper them!" ejaculated Theresa fervently. "But if Taverna has done so, it must be against the king's will; and to me, the conspiracy is proved. Now listen, Ricardo," she continued with enthusiasm: "I would not seek to meddle with such a matter: but Providence has revealed it to me, and were I silent I should become a party to it. That I will never be. I say not who is right or who is wrong: but my conscience is not strong enough to risk the decision; my duty alone is clearly shewn me. I will hie me directly to Queen Margaret and tell her all I know. Then let God defend the right!"

“And so you would deliver my lord and the countess and all of us to the king, on what may, after all, be a false rumour?”

“I will do my duty, Mardano. And if I did not, the matter would nevertheless be published. The Lady Corazza and her guardian, the slave of Abderachman, heard Gavaretto reveal it all to me. The Saracen will soon carry the news to the Alcazar and claim his reward.”

“Gavaretto!” repeated MacMardagh thoughtfully; “where saw you him?”

“He came out to me from a wine booth near the church: and thither he is, doubtless, returned.”

MacMardagh stamped his foot to the ground with vexation. He well knew the quiet resolution of his companion, which would urge her to carry through any undertaking which she considered enforced

by conscience: and he walked on with her some hundred yards in silence.

“Listen to me, mistress Theresa,” he said at length. “I know that you will do what you say, and I cannot prevent you. Do not, however, call down the king’s anger upon those whom you suspect without giving them warning that they may escape it. Abderachman, you say, will reveal all you know of the conspiracy, if it exists. Let me pray you, by the love you bear the countess, to do nothing this day further than to warn those whose safety ought to be dear to you. Ride to Mistretto: tell the countess all you know and all you intend: put her and him she loves upon their guard: then act as your own conscience shall urge you.”

After some persuasion, Theresa agreed to follow the plan suggested. Truth to say, she was glad to excuse herself from

the duty which her conscience imposed upon her.

“ I will do as you wish,” she said ; “ and the more readily, as I am certain that Abderachman will tell all before twenty-four hours be past.”

With hurried assiduity, Richard Mac Mardagh made one of his followers dismount, and then seated her carefully upon the saddle. His good will was, indeed, put sorely to the test by the conscientious obstinacy which led her so to resolve to thwart all his plans : but he concealed his vexation as well as he could ; and ordering the other trooper to guard her as far as the castle of Mistretto, he bade heaven speed her with less of sincerity and of kindly feeling than he had ever yet known towards her. Then leaping upon his own charger, he dashed his spurs into its side and galloped off to find Gavaretto and the Count of Sanseverino.

“We will see who can move fastest, mistress Theresa!” he said to himself. “The rising must take place this very night, or to-morrow’s sunset will see us all gibbeted on the Square of the Cassaro.”

CHAPTER XII.

“How brightly shines the moon! Our clock
Looks glad. The hour of ten is struck.
The ten commandments show thy law,
Great God! May we obey with awe.
Pray ere thou sleep. Pray angels spread
Their sheltering wings above thy head.
Let God thine every impulse share;
And be thy toil and rest—a prayer.”

The Village Clock.

It was night over the fair city of Palermo: a night made glorious by the bright moon of Sicily, floating, in the azure sky, with an effulgence that dimmed the lustre of every star and planet. There was no frost: but it was the second night after Christmas-day; and a Christmas moon looks, everywhere, cold and gladsome. Not a sound was heard throughout the wide city: not a figure was seen moving through

the silent streets that lay in darkest shade or in a brilliant light, scarce less clear than that of day. All slept within the palace of the Alcazar, except the few weary sentinels who drowsily paced their accustomed beats. Duke Roger's great clock alone broke, at regular intervals, the stillness of all around. How its golden face shone in the glare of the smiling moon ! And hark to the loud whirring noise that betokens the throes of what is then deemed to be its almost superhuman machinery ! It is about to strike. Three o'clock. Surely it never sounded so loud before ! And what a death-like silence follows the jarring peal ! Those strokes that seem, to some, loud enough to awaken the whole city, rouse not a single dreamer ; so accustomed are they already to what, but a few short years before, they listened to as a work of necromancy !

But to whom do those sullen strokes seem so unusually loud? Who are they who fear lest they should waken up the citizens to life and consciousness? Who!—look:—look where they creep along on the dark shaded side of the street. Two: three: and, anon, half a dozen more. How stealthily they hug the walls of the houses, as they wind, beneath the overhanging balconies and gable ends, nearer and nearer to the palace! No one sees them. No one hears them. No one dreams what may be their errand.

The night wind sighs stealthily around the towers of the palace. Perhaps it is rising; or, all is now so still, that perhaps we therefore mark it more than before. The air grows keen, in sooth. The sentry wraps his cloak more tightly around his leather-jerkin. And now he crouches from the blast in an angle of the battlement.

He is a stranger to the place. Ha! ha! How he starts, like a guilty thing, as the clock strikes the hour beside him! Four o'clock. And see: three more figures pause to listen to the clapper:—down there in the street below: in the shadow of that overhanging porch of a ruined mosque. They listen awhile: and now they move on again. We can only discover them by the deeper darkness of their disguise. Their cloaks are blacker than the shadows around.

How loudly the ticking of the clock sounds through the still air! It seems to be the only thing that has life in that dark city. The only thing? Hark! Listen to the low growl of mastiffs in the street below. And, what noise was that? tramp, tramp. But the clock gives notice again. It gives out its angry whirring sound; and now it strikes: Five o'clock. It is silent

now again : and—tramp—tramp. Surely trained men are gathering somewhere near at hand ! and, surely those dogs do not now bark so incessantly without cause ! It cannot be at the moon. Look where she sinks down towards the horizon, leaving all the starry host of heaven (almost as bright as that to which the first idolators built the temple of Babel) to reign with increased lustre over her vacated realm. How bright-eyed Aldeboran looks through and through the skies ! And mighty Orion, which so many gaze at with a feeling of unaccountable sympathy and dread—how cheerily it stands forth and rejoices in the waning of the moon ! A shooting star, too, slides from somewhere overhead ; and streaking the blue vault of heaven, seems to hasten to quench itself in the waveless sea. Is every night on the battlements of the Alcazar as eventful as this ? or is this unusually exciting in its stillness ?

Six o'clock : and a cock, in the distance, crows ; the sentinels observe nothing extraordinary. They have scarcely looked beyond their own rounds. Even now, they take no note of the six muffled figures that, coming from the same quarter whence the others emerged, advance stealthily nearer and nearer to the palace. Whither are they all going ? What becomes of them all, that they return not again by the way they came ? Nearer and nearer they approach the palace ; and now they skirt its very wall : and now—and now they dart along that narrow alley, and diving down that flight of narrow steps, they stand in the low kitchen of the jailor, Gavaretto.

“ I thank the stars that your signoria is come at last ! ” exclaimed the Count of Lesina, as Simon of Policastro entered the room. “ It is near seven o'clock according to the new-fangled, dismal machinery over-

head: and I have been long anxious to begin."

"Patience, brave Lesina," replied the prince. "There was much to be done elsewhere. I have been collecting and stationing troops where they might best avail us. Now, however, Gavaretto, lead the way. Sanseverino, I rejoice to meet thee," he added, observing the other nobleman.

A noble band of Norman chivalry did, indeed, stand around him. All who could be warned of the unforeseen necessity of hastening the outburst of the conspiracy, and who could be spared from other points which it was necessary to defend or attack, had collected in the jailor's quarters; well knowing that the first decisive blow might be struck from the prisons.

"Would that the Lords of Taverna and Aquila were here with us!" ejaculated several voices at once.

“ Fortunately for them we had no time to forewarn them and so to break in upon their nuptial retirement,” observed Simon of Policastro: “ but we are strong enough without them.”

“ We are indeed strong enough without them, my lords, if I may be permitted to speak,” said Richard MacMardagh, stepping forwards. “ I have, however, despatched a messenger at full speed to tell my lords what had been resolved on, and to bid them detain at Mistretto one who would have returned to reveal all to the queen.”

“ Bravo ! bravo ! Now then, Gavaretto, onwards !” exclaimed several.

Dismal, indeed, by the shaded light of torches and in the grey twilight of a wintry morning, were those wretched labyrinths where the noblest blood of the kingdom had so long pined in hopeless captivity.

In none of the cells could a man stand upright. Few of them were cheered by the checkered light that stole through iron bars from the outer court : the others were further underneath the palace, and had no other means of receiving air or light than that which they borrowed from the outer row of prisons. Some cells, again, were deep in the ground beneath all these : and several prisoners, who had been strong and healthy when first consigned to their miserable keeping, could now hardly stand upright or use their limbs when the fetters were removed from them. This was done in every case : almost every prisoner was set free : not only because it was desirable to increase the band of assailants as much as possible, but because none were there in whom one or other of the assembled knights did not feel an interest, which made him insist on their immediate libera-

tion. Eight o'clock was tolled from the great clock of the palace before the fetters were removed from all ; and before all had again collected in the halls and passages as near as possible to the quarters of Gavarretto.

“ What boots it to unlock my chains !” exclaimed the mutilated Prince of Capua, peevishly, to the knights that stood around him : for the near prospect of possible deliverance made him the more regret his helpless state. “ To him whose eyes have been burned out, and the sinews of whose legs have been cut across, every place must be alike a dungeon. However ; God speed ye, messires. Do the work of vengeance, and I will be with you in thought. But now, why do ye tarry ? Not a moment should be lost unnecessarily.”

“ We await but the signal, monseigneur,” replied the Lord of Sanseverino. “ The

the strongest constitution to have to turn out of a warm bed in this wretched Christmas weather. They may say what they like of Sicily, but I would wager my gold sceptre against an oaken staff, that it is not now so cold in Normandy as it is here."

"We have no snow here, my lord, at all events," expostulated the archdeacon.

"No snow! What will you wager that there is not snow at this moment half-way down *Ætna*?" cried William. "However, let me have some hot drink to warm me, Errico; and say," he added, "what news is there this morning, to reward one for getting up?"

"None, your grace," replied the Admiral. "I hear of none save that a Saracen, a wild character whom I do not like, but to whom poor Majone enjoined that favour was to be shown, waits below, in order to deliver

information which he declares to be of the greatest importance to your lordship."

"Let him wait," said the king. "It is against the rule to receive applicants at this early hour. Will he not tell his secret even to you?"

"He will not: he says it touches your grace's life, and that he will expect a proportionate reward."

"Then he will not get one! He must himself have been mingled with traitors to know their designs. It must, you know, be the fellow Abderachman, who has always some claim or another. Let him be put out of the way. And now," he continued, as he took a posset of hot wine that was brought in by Adinulfo, "now let us settle our plans against these cursed Lords of Taverna and Aquila, who have set the prerogative of the crown at defiance, and have wed without our permission. By

Saint Martin of Tours, but I will myself rise willingly at daybreak to smoke them out of their castles! Ha! What does that mean?" he cried, as the great bell of Santa Agata began to toll in the neighbouring tower.

Slow and heavy and solemn tolled the deep-toned bell above the city.

"It must be a fire!" said the king, moving to the window. "Send and inquire, Errico. And now I bethink me to observe it, how wondrous silent the town is this morning! Look here; scarcely a citizen is to be seen on the Cassaro! But yes—see—what troops are those coming down from the street? Errico, I say!"—

At that instant, the door of the room was flung rudely open, and Prince Tancred and Simon of Policastro appeared on the threshold.

"How now!" cried the king furiously.

“By the holy face of Lucca, who let thee out of bounds! Is this the way in which my prisons are guarded?”

“We are weary of remaining in them,” returned Tancred quietly. But at the same moment, cries of women and multiplied exclamations were heard from other parts of the palace.

“Errico! Adinulfo! my sword, my shield!” cried the king vehemently, as the other released prisoners poured into the apartment.

“They avail not,” replied Simon of Policastro, “the Rocca is in our power; and, hark to the cries from below.”

“Down with William the Bad!”

“Long life to King Ruggiero!”

The king looked askance through the window. The Cassaro was now filled with armed men, bearing the cognizance on their banners, which, at a glance, he

recognized as those of the principal counts of Sicily.

“On him, friends! on him!” cried Roberto Bovenese, rushing forwards from amongst the conspirators.

“Wait! wait! let me have a blow at him!” exclaimed the Count of Lesina, in his well-known savage voice, as he pushed through the throng with his naked sword in his hand.

“Mercy! mercy! seigneurs,” cried the king, terror-stricken at the sight. “Spare my life. Give me time to repent. Only spare my life, and I swear to you that I will willingly leave the kingdom.”

“Trust him not!” repeated Lesina: “at him while he is in our power!”

“Count, you forget our compact!” exclaimed Simon of Policastro interposing. “His life is sacred.”

“Such a compact is better forgotten

than remembered !” cried the savage count pushing past him with the almost super-human strength that was his.

A few moments would have terminated the existence of King William of Sicily and his chronicle, if Richard MacMardagh had not, with extraordinary agility, dived under the brandished weapon of the Count of Lesina, and placed himself directly before the sovereign. He flourished his iron mace like a willow wand ; a single blow of it broke the count’s sword into shivers ; and Robert of Bovense, and the more revengeful of the other released prisoners, shrunk back on all sides from so unusual a weapon, as it spun round and round in the hands of the Irishman. Simon of Policastro, the Count of Sanseverino, and the other more moderate of the conspirators, had time to surround the king. They assured him that his life was in no danger ;

and although not quite convinced of the moderation of their intentions, he poured forth in return endless thanks and protestations of his willingness to resign the crown and to leave the kingdom. With some difficulty, the more violent of the conspirators were induced to evacuate the room. The king was left in it with a strong guard under the command of Richard MacMardagh, on whose moderation the Count Simon saw that he could depend: and the others quickly hastened to look after their followers and to complete the work so successfully begun.

It was time for them to do so. For the prisoners and the heads of the conspiracy had been joined by the mob, who had broken in from below; and every part of the palace was now filled with a raging and destroying multitude. The body of Adinulfo already lay bleeding in the pas-

sage: and the shrieks of eunuchs on every side shewed that the mob was avenging its long-smothered hatred upon these despised and willing tools of the tyranny of Majone and of a degenerate court. It would have been a hopeless task to attempt to keep order amongst such an angry population as had now taken the revolution into their own hands. Plunder and vengeance were the objects of all: and whilst the rooms were stripped of their costly Grecian furniture; while the most precious jewels and wardrobes were contended for by the rabble; while dying eunuchs encumbered every passage, and even the ladies and servants of the court cried in vain for mercy, the Counts Tancred, Sanseverino and Policastro pushed through the throng and eagerly sought out the apartment of the queen and the royal children. They rejoiced to find that these were as yet un-

discovered, and consequently unmolested. With honourable courtesy, they endeavoured to appease the fears of Queen Margaret; and immediately removed her and her children, for greater safety, to the same room as that in which they had left the king. The guard upon the royal prisoners was encreased, and every precaution for their safe keeping was adopted.

Count Simon of Policastro then approached little Roger where he stood, with the other children, nestling around the queen; and kissing his hand, asked him to come away with him.

“No! no! no!” exclaimed the child passionately, “I will not go from papa and mama.”

“Tut! tut! carino!” replied the count gently. “Come with me and thou shalt be made king.”

“I do not want to be made king, uncle;”

replied the boy drawing back his hand. "Papa is king: let me alone, I say!" and he ran back to his brother William and little Constance.

"I must trust to your Grace to pardon me hereafter," the count said goodnaturally, as he took him up in his arms and bore him by force to the door. The child screamed and kicked in terror, and appealed to his father to rescue him from uncle Simon and the wicked barons, so he had been long taught to consider them. William, however, spoke not. A look of savage irony alone found place in his countenance, and declared the smothered hatred and jealousy he had long felt towards the innocent child.

"Just what the monk Giovacchino foretold!" he exclaimed to Queen Margaret, as Ruggiero was borne from the room.

The conspirators soon found means of

quieting the child: and by the aid of his tutor, the Archdeacon of Cefalú, he was so far pacified and encouraged as to look upon what was done to him as play, and therefore to be enjoyed. They placed him upon a white war horse in the court of the palace; and all the principal leaders of the revolution—Tancred, Policastro, Sanseverino, Squillace, and others—formed themselves in order around and after him. Their armed followers ranged themselves behind: and splendid was the cavalcade that issued from the gates of the Alcazar on that eventful day. The tutor, Archdeacon of Cefalú, rode at its head; and, in a loud voice, proclaimed Ruggiero, Duke of Puglia, to be King of Sicily and Italy; and called upon all to swear obedience to his uncle, Prince Simon, who would govern as regent during the child's minority. Loud cheers greeted the announcement

and hailed the boy-king wherever he appeared. The rabble called down curses on the head of his father; and the women blessed the smiling face of the pretty and intelligent-looking child. For now he had entered into the spirit of the scene; and thoughtlessly enjoyed the applause with which he was everywhere greeted. The Saracens alone fled at the approach of the procession. They had ever been unduly favoured by King William, and they now suffered from the vengeance of the Italians. Their shops were broken open; their stores were rifled; and many of them were slain by their exasperated and jealous rivals.

From the closed and well-barred house of the jeweller, Azab, his cousin, Abderachman, looked forth upon the splendid procession as it passed. Cheer upon cheer accompanied it, and many took the oath proposed by the tutor.

“ Let them shout themselves hoarse,” said Abderachman to his kinsman where they stood behind the shutters. “ I will find a means to spoil their sport. May I die if I permit the enemies of the Saracens, and the followers of the Baron of Taverna, to triumph without a blow ! If this boy be really made king, Taverna will be safe in his barony for ever.”

“ Long life to Roger, Duke of Puglia !”

“ Long life to King Ruggiero the Second !” cried many a voice as the procession again emerged from the quarter of the Saracens.

“ Long life to him, friends !” cried the archdeacon and the nobles around. “ We will crown him king so soon as the Baron of Taverna arrives.”

“ Evviva the Baron of Taverna !”

“ The slayer of Majone for ever !” shouted the multitude with an enthusiasm for

their favourite that had not even yet cooled.

Thus, amid loud cheers and almost universal approbation, the noble procession moved on through the crowded streets. The bells rang joyful peals; draperies were hastily hung from the windows; and evergreen boughs were thrown under the feet of the horses as they passed. Some, indeed, refused to take the oath of allegiance to the boy-king and the regent: the clergy in particular held themselves aloof from the revolutionists; but no one openly gainsaid them; and a mighty change seemed to have been effected in one short day, and with little bloodshed. The cavalcade had moved through the town for some hours, and the poor child was quite wearied out with the noise and excitement. The citizens were, however, at length returning to their homes. Strong bodies

of troops had been placed by the leaders at different points of the town, and patrolled the streets to repress outrage and riot. As the procession returned to the palace, others were driving out the motley rabble that had so rioted within its walls. Many were laden with its spoils as they passed ; and these, of course, loudly cheered the cavalcade. It was not safe to attempt to reclaim the depredations of such favourable partisans ; and wearied and exhausted, the boy-king rode back into the courtyard of the Alcazar.

Loud cheers uprose as the gates were closed behind the horsemen, but the multitude in the square demanded vociferously again to behold him. The Count of Sanseverino and the others led him to a window in front of the palace, whence he was visible to the concourse below. Enthusiastic was the greeting he received ; and his bright

eyes danced and his pale cheeks again flushed with pleasure and excitement. Cheer after cheer hailed him and the conspirators, as the saviours of their country.

Abderachman was in the crowd below. He was in an angle formed by another building, and was visible but to few of the multitude. He loosened his small bow from his back: drew an arrow from his quiver, and fixed it to the string: he could take no aim for fear of being observed: but, in an instant, the bow twanged from his ear, and was dropped under his feet as he moved carelessly away. It twanged from his ear: and an arrow sped to the window and passed through the shoulder of the poor child where he was making his little gestures of welcome to the people below. He uttered a shriek of pain, which was not heard amid the cheers: and before the event was seen or understood by any,

his uncle drew him back within the window. The arrow fell from the wound.

“Let me go to mama and papa, uncle. Let me go to mama!” he cried.

PolICASTRO led him tenderly to the room in which they were still confined.

“Oh dear papa,” he cried as he entered, “I am so tired and so hurt! I will not be king any more: indeed uncle I will not!” he repeated, running towards his father.

KING WILLIAM had heard all the cheers. His mean jealous spirit had raged for hours against his child. He saw him running towards him from the scene of his triumph—from that enthusiastic greeting which he himself had long ceased to receive. The child opened its little arms to spring to its father’s embrace: the father raised his foot, and with all his whole strength kicked him angrily in the chest.

The king of half a day, little Roger of Apulia, fell with a stifled groan ; and in a few minutes lay a lifeless corpse before his parents.*

* History records that William's life was saved, and the child slain in the manner we have described.

END OF VOL. II.



